# ELECTRONIC SOUND

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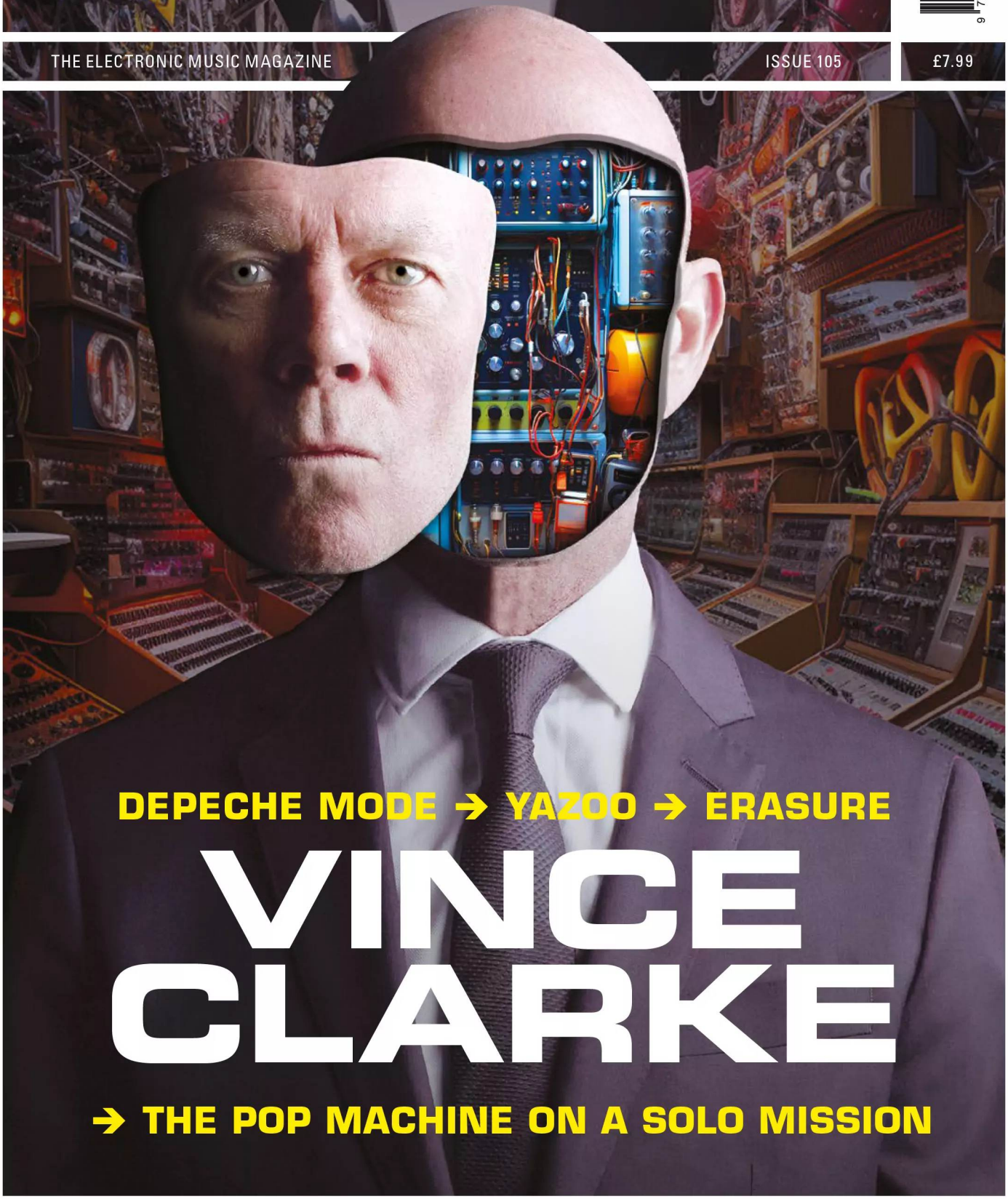


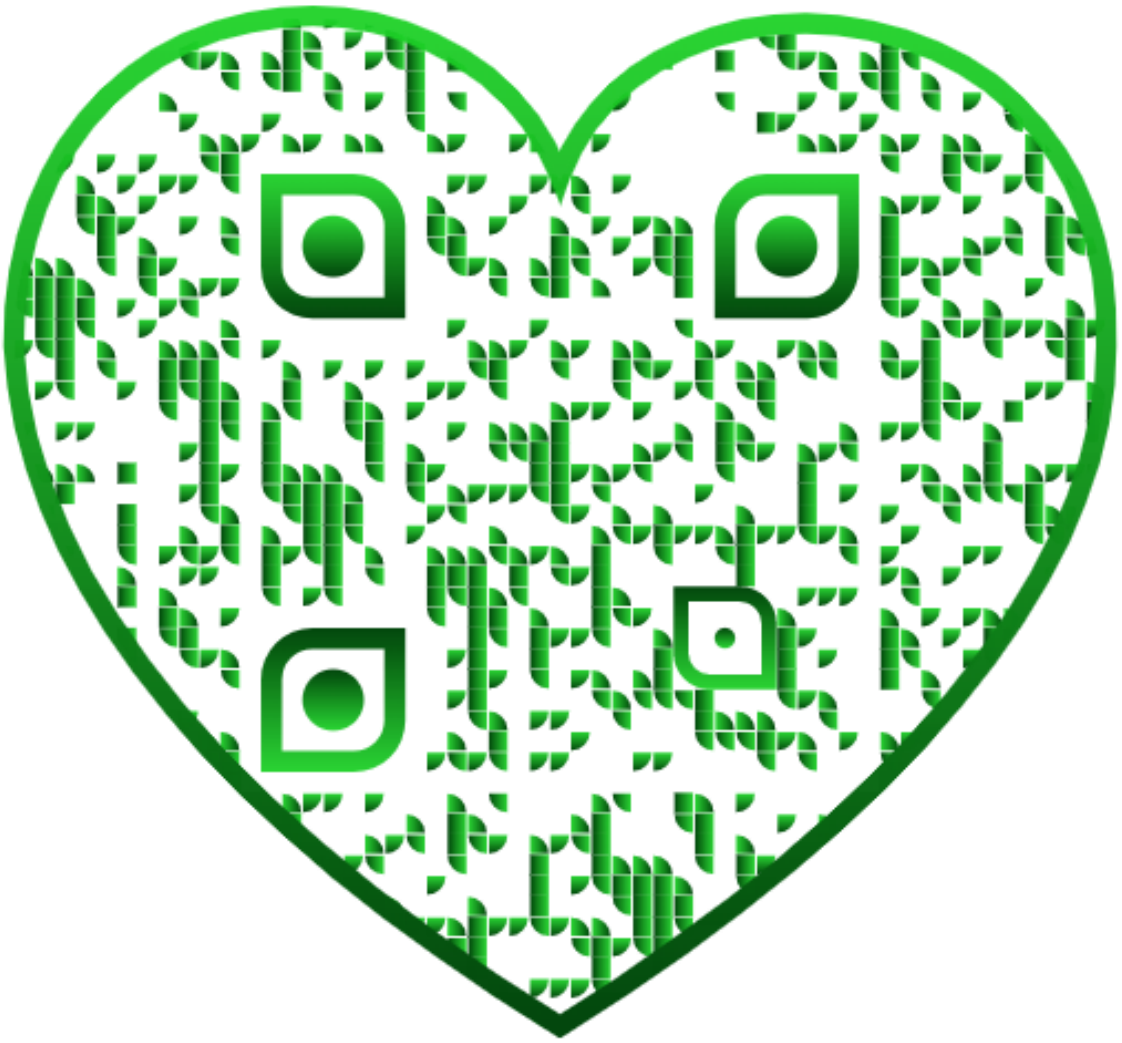
DEPECHE MODE → YAZOO → ERASURE

# VINCE CLARKE

→ THE POP MACHINE ON A SOLO MISSION

AR KANE / BELBURY POLY / GHOST BOX / BEVERLY GLENN-COPELAND / DOT ALLISON / DAS KOOLIES

IN YOUR FACE



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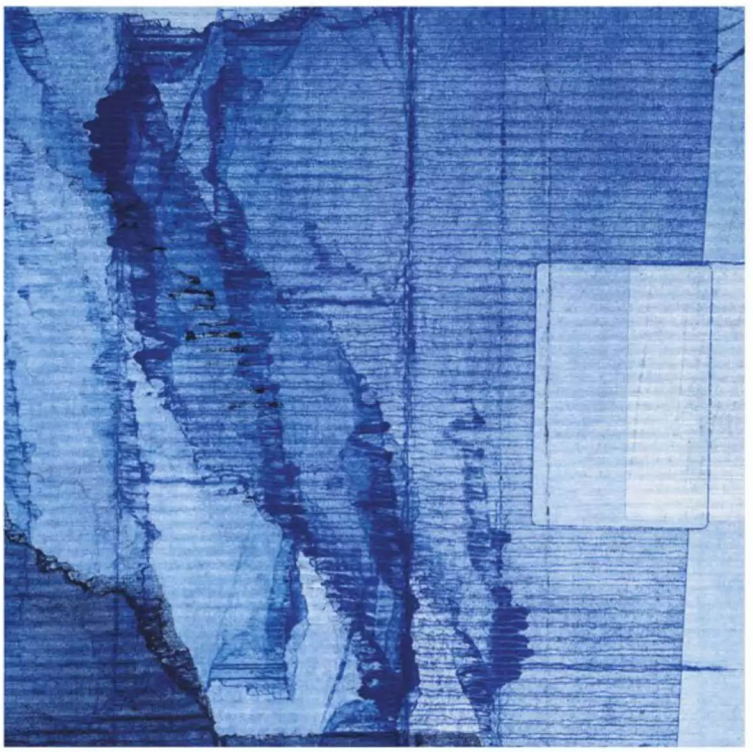

## REFRACT

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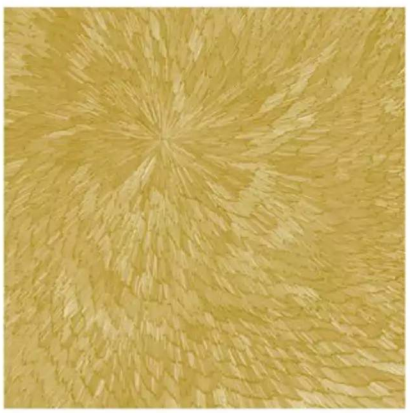

## MEDNA ROSO

PJEV - balkan choir

Kit Downes - organ

Hayden Chisholm - saxophone

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RH1003

## TWO CENTURIES

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Wadada Leo Smith - trumpet

Andrew Cyrille - drums

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## HANAMICHI

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Masabumi Kikuchi - piano

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# 105 WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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From his early days as a synthpop wunderkind in Depeche Mode, Yazoo and The Assembly, through to Erasure, VCMG (with Martin Gore) and a host of other collaborations, Vince Clarke has packed an awful lot into the last 40-odd years. And he has never been busier.

Juggling countless projects and remixes, always tinkering in the studio, and as obsessed as ever with synths and modular kit – perhaps even more so – Clarke isn't somebody who sits still for long. Almost permanently plugged into a sonic device of one sort or another, you'd imagine his mind to be a crazy interconnected hive of activity and ideas. As our features editor Velimir Ilic puts it in his exclusive interview with Clarke for this month's cover story, "the electronic force isn't so much strong as completely hard-wired".

The interview took place at Clarke's New York home studio and covers a lot of ground, including his formative pre-Depeche experiences in Basildon. And with the forthcoming release of what will be his debut solo album, 'Songs Of Silence', an exciting new chapter is about to unfold, as Clarke takes himself completely out of his usual comfort zone. Rather than the electropop earworms he's known for, this is something quite different, but just as special. Composed entirely on Eurorack, and with nods to folk music and opera, the 10 expansive soundscapes on 'Songs Of Silence' are possibly the most beautiful and moving tracks he has ever recorded.

In the glare of the spotlight for the first time as a solo artist, and completely on his own terms, the self-confessed control freak discusses the album's development and reflects on a remarkable career that has also recently seen him pivot into co-presenting his own radio show and even create a remarkably quirky animation channel. You can't help wondering when this man finds time to sleep.

You're probably not going to have much time for sleeping this month either. As well as the Vince Clarke feature, we have a bumper selection of other interviews for you, including Belbury Poly, AR Kane, Beverly Glenn-Copeland, Das Koolies, Dot Allison, Delmer Darion and Frankie Rose. We also have a piece on 'The NID Tapes', an intriguing compilation of Indian electronic music recorded between 1969 and 1972, while Ghost Box co-owner and sleeve designer Julian House talks us through some of his artwork for the label over the last two decades.

And with all that to get through, we'd probably better let you make a start. We've got a busy day ahead of us too, as it goes. We need to stick a certain electronic superstar's face back on his head. Right, where did we put the superglue?

**Electronically yours,**
**Push and Mark**

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## DEPECHE MODE

**Blackwing Studios, London**

17 JUNE 1981

### PICTURE: VIRGINIA TURBETT
### INTERVIEW: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"This photograph was taken outside Blackwing Studios in June 1981," says Virginia Turbett. "I think it was for Sounds, but it could have been for Smash Hits. I was 24 at the time. I'd started working for Sounds as a freelance photographer in 1978 and was learning on the job. The first time I used a camera was to photograph the Sex Pistols making their 'Pretty Vacant' video.

"I had no formal training at all, but the whole punk ethos was that anyone could do anything, and there were very kind, encouraging editors like Alan Lewis at Sounds, Ian Cranna at Smash Hits, and Nick Logan at The Face. They all made it possible to get work published without any qualifications whatsoever. I was very lucky to have been able to sell my work while I was learning. Doing that, as a music fan, was just bloody amazing.

"I remember very little about this shoot with Depeche Mode, but the photo proves that I must've been there! I do remember thinking how they were very young and innocent-looking. They were very nice, very friendly, funny, and grateful to have attention from the music press. I'd seen them at Steve Strange's People's Palace in February 1981, and called them 'the little pixie people'. I never would have told them that though…

"In this photo, Vince is sitting on the left of the bench while the others are laughing and sitting away from him, like they don't want to know him. Vince looked deadly serious and even had his head in his hands in another shot. It was all done in a very jokey way, but I have no idea what was going on, or why this happened. There are six frames of Vince on the left of the bench with the others all together. I would say that Vince did look like he's enjoying the whole photoshoot experience a lot less than the others, who are intent on having a laugh throughout. Vince was definitely the quiet, serious one – the Mike Nesmith of the band!

"I know Depeche Mode have made some stonkingly good music, and I absolutely recognise the genius of all band members, but I can't say I know all their songs or have followed their career, though I do know the hits. I regret that I didn't take more photos at the People's Palace and at Blackwing, but I didn't have a crystal ball, and was photographing so many bands each week at that time, not all of whom would be remembered now.

"I was friends with Heaven 17/BEF, who were my neighbours in west London, and I think it was probably listening to them and the great Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark who introduced me to the wonders of electropop. I've actually got a new zine of OMD images out on Hanging Around Books – it's available from my website too."

**For more of Virginia Turbett's work, go to virginiaturbett.com**

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C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/vinceclarke to buy this release on its own for £8.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

# Vince Clarke
# ‘The Lamentations Of Jeremiah’ / ‘The Cave’
# Clear vinyl seven-inch

This month’s exclusive seven-inch features two superb Vince Clarke tracks – one of them taken from his debut solo album and the other previously unreleased

## ‘THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH’

‘The Lamentations Of Jeremiah’ is one of the standouts of Vince Clarke’s forthcoming debut solo release, ‘Songs Of Silence’. With all of the sounds generated from Eurorack and each of the 10 tracks based on only one note, maintaining a single key throughout, the album is a stunning work of synth-generated “cosmic remoteness”.

Featuring Reed Hays from Reed & Caroline on cello, this track is inspired by Jeremiah, who’s known as the “weeping prophet”. He wrote the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible, the latter a series of funeral songs and elegies for the destruction of Jerusalem.

“The idea started with the word ‘lamentation’,” explains Clarke. “I went through a few things on the internet and I came up with ‘The Lamentations Of Jeremiah’, which turned out to be Jeremiah’s songs about the fate of the Jews in that particular part of history. I thought, ‘That’s really, really sad’.

“Reed Hays is a good friend of mine. We have been doing a radio show together for a few years. He’s composed and recorded a lot of music for TV, but he’s also a terrific cello player, so I sent him the track and asked if he wanted to play something over it. His emotional musical response triggered the title. His cello is so moving… I was thinking of tinkering with it a bit, maybe changing the arrangement, but in the end I just thought, ‘This is pretty amazing’.”

## ‘THE CAVE’

One of many tracks that Clarke was working on in tandem for ‘Songs Of Silence’, ‘The Cave’ didn’t make it onto the album, but its soaring, beatless ambience would have slotted in perfectly. In a similar vein to the rest of the record, it’s a thing of crafted beauty. Driven by a plangent drone, it has deeply atmospheric and ghostly echoes swirling ominously, all dark and dreamlike, and is redolent of the Berlin School of electronics, particularly Klaus Schulze’s work on defining releases such as ‘Timewind’ and ‘Moondawn’.

“The Cave’ is from a while back,” says Clarke. “I’m often working on several ideas at the same time. I did lots of drone tracks for the album and some of them I didn’t really finish. This was one of those, although I don’t know why…”

Clarke notes that he’d decided to send Mute boss Daniel Miller 10 tracks for ‘Songs Of Silence’ and the main reason ‘The Cave’ didn’t make the cut was because it still wasn’t finished. This final version, though, is very much in tune with the ethos of the album.

“Since sending the tracks to Daniel, I’ve been looking at some of the other ideas that I was messing about with and shaping them into more solid pieces,” he says. “That’s how ‘The Cave’ came about. I believe I originally had a different title for it, but then I saw a film called ‘The Cave’ and I thought the spookiness of it worked well with the sound of the track.”

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## ALL HANDS ON DECK

### Bauhaus-style turntable is a box of tricks

Inspired by the bold geometric shapes found in Bauhaus design, the Reed Muse 3A turntable is a genuine statement piece for audiophiles. Designed in Lithuania, this £12,870 deck is capable of switching between belt drive and friction drive, uses one coreless DC motor to dampen excess noise, and can even mount two tonearms. Oh, and it also comes with hidden supports so it looks like it's floating. Forgot to mention that. Extravagant is the word you're probably looking for. **reed.lt**

PULSE

## GAUNT

Sublime sounds for haunted dancefloors

### WHO?

GAUNT is the alias of Jack Warne, a former fine art student at the Royal College of Art whose disciplines straddle the musical and visual. GAUNT's debut album, 'Blind Since The Age Of Four', is named after a rare eye condition Warne suffers from known as Thiel-Behnke corneal dystrophy, of which the most extreme outcome is blindness.

### WHY GAUNT?

Warne's music seems deliberately unplaceable. His first tracks were heard on Leon Vynehall's 'Fabric Presents' compilation, indicating the pull of the dancefloor, but their structures felt uncomfortably "haunted" (as Warne himself describes them) by something far braver. It might be because they feel unshackled by convention, executed with a carefully constructed skittishness. Imagine Coldcut confessing a deep love for Robert Rauschenberg's collages. Extending the analogy further, GAUNT's tracks are like animated videos of those collages viewed through the blocked slits of a broken zoetrope.

### TELL US MORE...

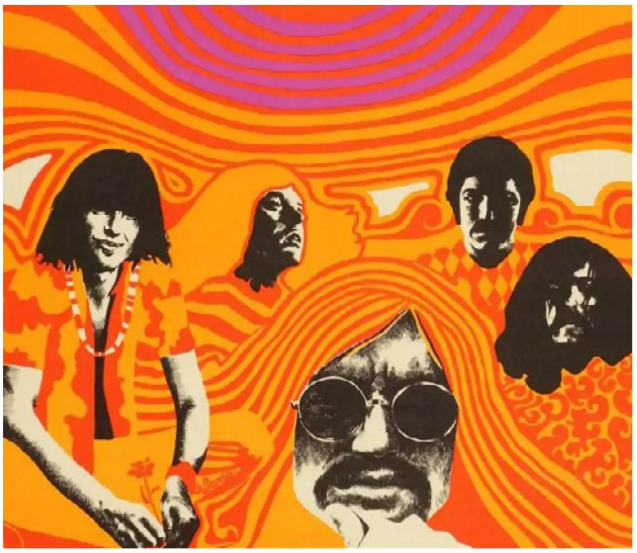
The album takes its own dizzying approach to extremes. On the one hand, you have tracks like 'Syncopate' and 'Sweet', both assembled with a beat-driven structure and a presentation somewhere between deconstructed dance music, reconstructed synthpop and modern R&B. 'UN' comes across more like a video game theme where the player controls the direction of the track, swerving the myriad left-field interventions that seem hell-bent on disrupting its progress. But at the album's other extreme lie 'Memories Talk', 'Lesser You' and 'Because I' (featuring a sample of 'Suspicion' by 4AD's Colourbox), each of which is a perfect example of vibrant, uncompromising sprawls inflected with distorted, inverted and interrupted vocals. All in all, inventive and ambitious ideas from the overflowing mind of Jack Warne.

**MAT SMITH**

**'Blind Since The Age Of Four' is out now on 3ON**

## ENIGMAS

### Sweeping forgotten corridors of sound, **Scott Blixen** sets his sights on **Illés**



Imagine yourself in a communist-era Hungarian rock band, if you will. No matter how receptive you may be to aftershocks from the other side of the Iron Curtain, you need apparatchik approval to perform and make records in your homeland. Illés formed towards the end of the 1950s, rode the wave of rock revolution and stayed on the right side of the censors until the early 70s.

In 1973, with a performance ban crippling the group, Illés created a freak 'n' roll LP masterwork as their swansong. While 'Ne Sírjatok, Lányok!' is unashamedly a pop-rock record, it stirs indigenous folk, MOR and outer-space electronics into a swirling cauldron of joyful alien jive. Roxy Music performed a similarly daring highwire act conjured from a world of effete decadence on their first album, whereas Hungary's sonic adventurers manifest magic in an altogether starker environment.

Unsheathing 'Ne Sírjatok, Lányok!' is a curious sensory experience, as Hungarian LPs of the 70s give off a strong smell of hospital-grade disinfectant. If Peter Tosh's 'Bush Doctor' offered a scratch 'n' sniff whiff of ganja, this LP evokes the air of bleak waiting rooms, until you drop the needle.

While the tactical deployment of synths transports the album into another dimension, it's unclear which gizmos bandleader Lajos Illés was using. Soviet-made Polivoks and Aelita synths were available in Warsaw Pact countries and, since the USSR's collapse, have become more widely known outside it. If these machines supercharged Illés, few other groups in 1973 were treating them with the same reckless abandon.

Side One ends with a one-two psychedelic sucker punch. 'A Bolond Lány' is a blizzard of mania-inducing percussion, savagely impolite synths and ring-modulated vocals. It's profoundly skewed and betrays no obvious Western forebears. Before you can repair your frayed synapses, 'Téli Álom' is subjected to the kind of extreme tape phasing that induces sea sickness.

At this apex, 'Ne Sírjatok, Lányok!' seems to be the work of enlightened extraterrestrials, not least as Hungarian is an otherworldly tongue to many English ears. Musically, it orbits a distant planet where The Sweet and Black Sabbath are in combat with Brian Eno and Joseph Byrd's United States Of America.

Side Two's insistent 'Nem Érdekel, Amit Mondsz' exceeds everything you might have expected in synth-drenched rock of this era, again forcing voices through discombobulating effects. It's followed by 'Holdfény '69', with a synth break of breathtaking bravado. Without acid-fried experience, it's difficult to know what psychedelia meant to folks in communist countries. To Illés, it clearly meant unfettered freedom.

## COUNTRYPHILE

### Further forays into eerie electronics

It won't be too long before writer Stephen Prince opens his own University of Hauntology, probably located down some muddy English bridleway. But until then, we'll have to make do with the latest edition to his cult series, 'A Year In The Country'. Sub-titled 'Lost Transmissions', this new book takes in the "haunted soundscapes of electronica", and promises "dystopic visions, alternate realities, paranormal quests and exploratory electronica", as Prince delves into music from the Radiophonic Workshop, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Hannah Peel, Boards Of Canada and Castles In Space. As ever, it's a must-read, and you can get your copy now for £14.95. **ayearinthecountry.co.uk**

## PLATE SPINNING

### Apple seek to patent their first turntable

VR isn't the only market Apple are sniffing around. As first reported in Gizmodo, the tech giant recently filed a trademark to the United States Patent and Trademark Office for "modularised computing and input devices", which includes a form of attachable turntable. Many of the details are still under wraps, but Apple describe the "computing device" as something "a music producer, disc jockey, an audio engineer" can use, allowing them to "remove the input device and remotely attach a keyboard or second display to the base to provide traditional laptop functionality". Whether anything comes of it remains to be seen, but considering Apple Music is fast becoming one of the most popular streaming services in the world, it's not that difficult to imagine us all eventually moving to an an iDeck in years to come. **gizmodo.com**

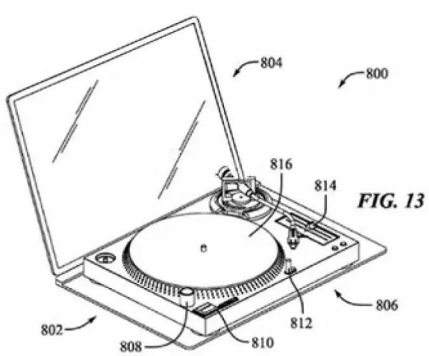


FIG. 13

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## NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **Woodleigh Research Facility** and **The Vacant Lots**

Things are hotting up on the ranch, including the outrageously fun Into The Cosmic Hutch podcast presented by Nina and me, and the long-awaited release of Woodleigh Research Facility's 'Borderland', one of the last pieces Nina worked on with Mr Weatherall at her Facility 4 studio before his untimely passing. Intended for a Barbican event that sadly never happened, it's a work of astonishing beauty, already being likened to a hymn.

"I wrote 'Borderland' on this little MIDI keyboard I had in the programming room I'd set up for Andrew," explains Nina. "When he heard it, he said, 'This really reminds me of 'Smokebelch'. That was just in raw form on synth."

She suggested bringing in renowned classically trained viola player Sarah Sarhandi to embellish the poignantly reflective melody.

"We then handed it to Andrew who arranged it, plundered the hard drive and added elements like his favourite tom-tom fill."

After Andrew's heart-tingling mountain glistener of a mix, the epic 2021 version by Jagz Kooner, who'd worked on the original as Weatherall's right-hand man during the Sabres years, fulfils the 'Smokebelch' vision. After the jittering synth intro, derived from Frankie Knuckles' 'Your Love', sets the scene, Jagz builds the melody to an emotionally charged peak, turning Sarah's viola into a swelling string section on the drop as Andrew's voice whispers, "Can you see the rockets?". It may bring tears as Jagz pays tribute to his fallen comrade – 'Smokebelch' style.

The track, which previously had the working title 'Yanob 14', was renamed 'Borderland' by Nina after a 19th century parapsychological journal edited by pioneering journalist WT Stead. The fourth release in her ongoing 'Apparently Solo' series is possibly the most significant so far – and wait until you hear 'Phonox Nights', the pair's last album created together.

Elsewhere, a deliciously Suicide-related season is brewing with Martin Rev's upcoming 'The Sum Of Our Wounds (Cassette Recordings 1973-85)'. Also worthy of investigation is 'Interiors', the fifth album from NY duo The Vacant Lots that sees Jared Artaud – curator of the Vega Vault with Liz Lamere – and Brian MacFadyen churning deeper into their riveting gothic processionals, space disco mutants and sonorous eulogies for collapsing modern society.

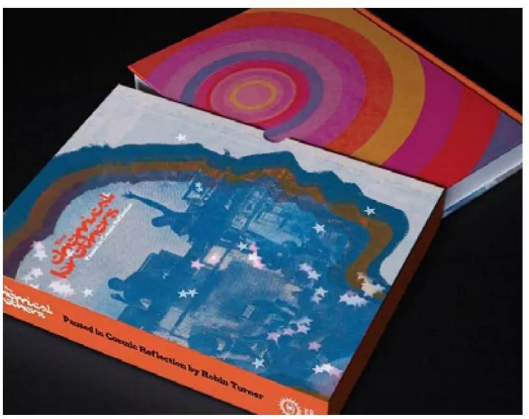
Like a pre-gentrification NY dirt-bomb booming from their Brooklyn bunker, Artaud's heavily reverbed vocals evoke scarred soul turmoil on titles like 'Amnesia', 'Evacuation' and 'Destruction' splattering like aural graffiti on a burned-out building. Suicide's spirit is alive and kicking. After Nina's 'Punkadelic!' biography, I'll be writing Martin Rev's 'New York Music City'.

**WRF's 'Borderland' is out now on Bandcamp. The Vacant Lots' 'Interiors' is released by Fuzz Club on 13 October**

## CHEM TRAILS

All hail the Chemical Bros bible

Distilling the essence of the mighty Chemical Brothers into a block-rockin' coffee-table tome is certainly a tall order, but if anyone can, Robin Turner can. Not only has he been their PR man since 1993, but he founded the famous Heavenly Sunday Social where Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons first made their names as The Dust Brothers, thereby spawning the big beat movement. The book features contributions from the likes of Noel Gallagher, Beck, Beth Orton and Erol Alkan, and at 336 pages, 'Paused In Cosmic Reflection' is the definitive story of this groundbreaking duo. Published next month by White Rabbit, preorder your hardback copy for £30. **whiterabbitbooks.co.uk**



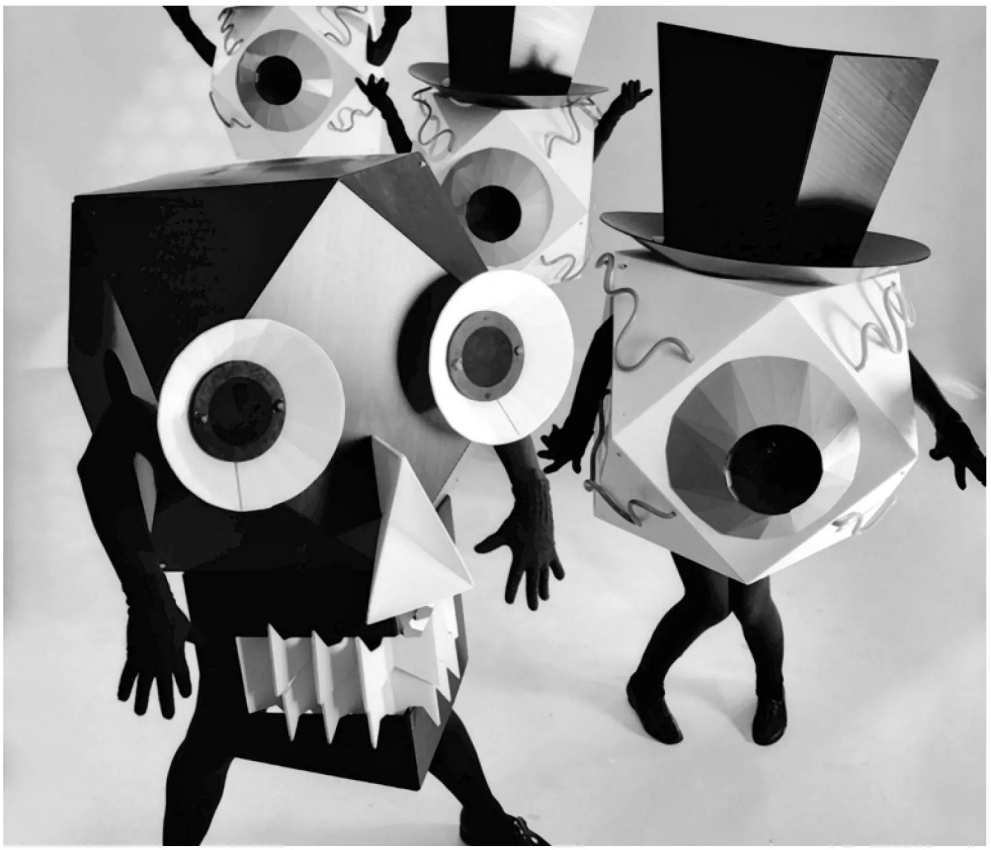

## WAX MACHINE

See vinyl production from start to finish

If you're curious about how vinyl records are made, then take a look at a new video from electronic artist Josh "Posthuman" Doherty. Showing the step-by-step process of producing his latest record 'Buzzing 24/7', the eight-minute vid starts from the very beginning, showing Doherty rendering the track and mastering it, before moving swiftly on to cutting the test pressing, processing the lacquer into stampers and the convoluted process of cutting the final records. After watching, we guarantee you'll appreciate your music collection even more than you do right now (if that's possible). And look out for the release of 'Buzzing 24/7' when it drops on Posthuman's label Balkan Recordings. **youtube.com/@Posthumanmusic**

## AN EYE FOR A HIGH

### Part II of The Residents' grand history is a keeper



For fans of everything weird and wonderful, the second volume of the authorised visual history of The Residents has landed, and it's truly a thing of beauty. Titled 'A Sight For Sore Eyes', the book charts the American art collective's activities after 'The Mole Show' and up to 1997's 'Disfigured Night', and features contributions from Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh, The Orb's Alex Paterson, and Meat Beat Manifesto's Jack Dangers, among others. Arriving full of previously unseen Residents paraphernalia, the 400-page book costs $85, or there's a $225 deluxe version which comes with a seven-inch of an unreleased track and a bonus book containing newsletters from The Residents' fan club.
**melodicvirtue.com**

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW

### Did someone say YMO room dividers?

Topping this month's list of things you didn't know you needed are these limited edition room dividers, which are adorned with the American cover of Yellow Magic Orchestra's self-titled debut album from 1978. Designed by artist Lou Beach, the graphic depicts the marriage of traditional Japanese beauty with the idea of Japan as a hi-tech nation on the rise, and while the album sold 250,000 copies in Japan, they've only made 50 of these £5,400 items, so don't hang about. **technobyobu.jp**

## VA VA VOOM

### The "Italian Moog" is back in production

Ready thy wallets. The Crumar Spirit monosynth is officially being revived, 40 years after it was first designed. And by who, you might ask? None other than Bob Moog, leading to it being referred to as the "Italian Moog". The fundamentals of the synth will be almost identical to the original. Luciano Lura, who engineered the first iteration, stated that only 100 ever saw the light of day, and for this new edition, the same number of units will be built. Shipping directly from factory to customer in December, they're available for preorder now for €3,990. A portion of the proceeds will be going to the Marche Synth Museum in eastern Italy whose experts apparently played a key role in the revival. **crumarspirit.com**

## RADIO HEADS

### Read unearthed interviews from electronic pioneers

Imagine you're a university student in 1980s New York, bagging interviews with the likes of John Cage, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Laurie Anderson, La Monte Young, and many more. Well, that's exactly what happened to Brooke Wentz, a former undergrad at Columbia University who hosted the radio show 'Transfigured Night'. Her new book 'Transfigured New York' features every one of them, and the conversations are not only fascinating, they're candid. Many of the young interviewees talk about the difficulties of everyday life, such as surviving as an artist in New York (what's changed, eh?). Out in November, this is essential reading, and it's available to preorder in hardback for £35. **cup.columbia.edu/books**

**PULSE**

## MARY LOVETT

### Channelling electronic music's matriarchs

**WHO?**

"A grown-ass mature neurodiverse woman" is how Norwich musician Mary Lovett identifies herself. Which is fitting for an artist whose colourful electronic productions are playfully technical, and no doubt satisfy her desire to explore "the wonder of mathematics and the catharsis of expressing things in music that are too difficult to say in words".

**WHY MARY LOVETT?**

Lovett's new album, 'I Heard The Moon Is In C', is a lavish patchwork of explorative electronica paying homage to her "ancestral matriarchal line of pioneers in electronic music". Lovett keenly cites Daphne Oram, Delia Derbyshire, Laurie Anderson, Suzanne Ciani and Pauline Oliveros among her copper-wired icons, and it coalesces for a sound which is certainly eclectic. You can hear jazz samples and folk elements blending with finely crafted electronica that could see you stroking your chin just as easily as it could get your feet moving. 'Tambor' sees Lovett's lilting vocals, soft as moonlight, wrap themselves around a cascading polyrhythm. 'Riptide', in which she simplifies her palette to just a few pensive piano chords while evoking a connection between the natural world and the ever-changing human condition. And the fabulously titled 'Dystopian Flip Flop', where a lone voice solemnly recalls how "all that sourdough was just a cry for help". Hilarious (and painfully true).

**TELL US MORE...**

Lovett says music saved her from "an overactive brain", and since discovering this sonic outlet, she's poured everything she has into her work. Aside from releasing music, she also constructs elaborate sound devices like the Fibonacci Liberace Automata – an interactive machine using binaural sound design and an automaton to enable users to visualise a sine wave. Smart. But Lovett is only just getting started. Stay tuned to see what happens next.

**ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH**

**'I Heard The Moon Is In C' is released via Bandcamp on 29 September**

New York art-popster **Frankie Rose** reflects on Brooklyn venues, synth epiphanies and her love of film

**INTERVIEW: JOE SILVA**

### 1980s MUSIC

"I grew up with MTV, so that was certainly an influence on me. We had KROQ too, and of course what was on the radio was all that 80s stuff. That's what was being played in the early 90s. Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and The Cure and things like that, so it definitely permeated my psyche as a kid.

"I had a cousin who was into all that. He was a mega-goth and I thought he was so cool – he was kind of a big brother influence, which is how I began hearing it all. My first record was by The Smiths when I was 12. I didn't have many records as a kid, but with 'Hatful Of Hollow' I knew every single song. I was obsessed."

### DIY VENUES

"It was an amazing time in Brooklyn back then. Glasslands and 285 Kent were kind of sketchy but that was part of the fun. It's kind of sad because a lot of them are actually gone now as a result of gentrification. They fostered a real community of musicians that wanted to play out, and it was like a built-in audience.

"You would go in there and MGMT would be playing a secret show. There were so many nights, it was just a really special place. I'm lucky because pretty quickly the bands that started out as DIY for me, we ended up getting a booking agent. That really shaped me enormously because there were places to play."

### SYNTH YOU BROUGHT IT UP...

"Everything used to be a lot more guitar-centric for me and now it's really not. I'm much more interested in synthesisers and sampled drums – I don't even mess with live drums anymore. I think I didn't understand synths at first, they were a little bit out of my range of comprehension.

"I started messing around on them when I got asked to do a Strokes cover for something or other, and I knew I wanted to go more in the synth direction. I was like, 'Oh my God, this is awesome!', and from there it's just been more and more and my music keeps getting more electronic. There's barely any guitar at all on 'Love As Projection' – I used a lot of soft synths on it."

## PUNK IT UP

"Because I'm from a certain generation, there weren't rock camps for girls or anything like that. So I was an ultimate fangirl of bands, I went to all the shows – they used to have punk shows at the library. I don't think I realised I could be in a band. It took me a long time to understand that. I was probably 22 or something, and I was friends with other women who were like, 'Wait, we could do this!'.

"That was in San Francisco. There used to be DIY shows at the railway stations. We would plug in to the power outlets there and just play. All the punks would come and it was really fun. I was playing drums. I didn't know how to play, but there was an overwhelming excitement about it regardless. People were so supportive. The response that we got was so good. I thought, 'This is what I want to do from here on out'."

## MUSICAL THEATRE

"My mom put me in musical theatre when I was a kid. I think I played Annie three times. That's got to have some kind of impact. I think performing exposed me to playing instruments. I'm pretty sure that did something to my brain in terms of understanding song structures and choruses – simple stuff like that. And also being in front of an audience and playing to the crowd."

## MAD ABOUT MOVIES

"If I could be a filmmaker, that's 100 per cent what I would do – if I was rich and could make whatever I wanted. I love Julia Ducournau – she's a French film director who makes horror movies. She made that 'Titane' movie. And 'Raw' was amazing. I love soundtracks – I'll take a Vangelis soundtrack any day – and sci-fi.

"Films bring together everything. It's music, acting, costume – an ultimate vision. They move me in a way that listening to a record might not. They are the most inspiring thing. But it's so hard to make it because it takes so many people. I'm honestly amazed at how films ever get made – I can't wrap my head around it."

**Frankie Rose's 'Love As Projection' is out now on Night School**

## HIT ME WITH YOUR RHYTHM SHTICK

### Mixing music and video games

If you thought joysticks were a thing of video gaming culture, think again. The CMPSR from Derby's Digit Music is a smart MIDI controller that allows you to assign different notes, chords, samples and more to simple gestures on the joystick, promising new channels for enhanced tactility – whether cooped up in your studio or out playing live. The £299 price tag might sound hefty, but this thing's built like a brick, and a good option for anyone needing new ideas for expression. **digitmusic.co.uk**

## HEY LITTLE BIRDIE

### Monitor the air quality in your living spaces

If you spend a lot of time indoors, air quality is something you might be overlooking, as keeping your windows shut all day can allow chemicals and allergens to build up to potentially dangerous levels. But this bright yellow wall-mounted CO2 monitor from Danish company Birdie, designed to mimic a canary in a coal mine by alerting you when it's time to open a window, will do the trick. It won't just bleep mindlessly at you though – part of the selling point is that it's non-smart, so you'll be free of annoying notifications or needless apps. Instead it just subtly turns 180 degrees when the CO2 levels exceed 1000ppm. It's battery-operated, made from 100 per cent recycled plastics, rechargeable via USB-C, and yours for £170. **birdie.design**

## DOWNTOWN LIGHTS

### Roland's upcoming Tokyo outlet

They may be giants of the electronic landscape, but Roland have never opened a dedicated physical store in their homeland of Japan – until now. After launching their inaugural retail location in central London in 2022 to commemorate the company's 50th birthday, an even bigger store is set to follow in Tokyo's Shibuya district, with the first customers being welcomed in October. The Japanese store will operate on an appointment-based "demo-on-demand" system with Roland product specialists, and the florally named "audience-specific experience" will also be available for customers to sample their own lighting, audio and video while shopping. **roland.com**

**PULSE**

## DEBRIS DISCS

### Synthpopper traces WWII family history

**WHO?**

It's James Eary, holed up in the Peak District, and his new album 'Post War Plans' is lavish synthpop with a touching genesis. Eary's grandfather, Alan Howard, was a Second World War "Desert Rat" serving in Egypt, and the album is inspired by recently unearthed letters written to his worried family back home. "I spent a lot of time with my Grandpa when I was younger, building dens in his office and picking berries from his garden," says James. "I had a nasty car accident as a child and it was my grandpa who carried me into the hospital, so I kind of hero-worshipped him."

**WHY DEBRIS DISCS?**

Turning intimate wartime missives into shimmering, electronic anthems shouldn't really work, but it does. "I wanted to approach the album from a cinematic perspective, but was struggling to form a narrative," explains James. "These letters gave me the dramatic story arc I was missing." The album's lynchpin is the heartbreaking 'Dear Fred', based on a letter written by Alan to his brother. "I'd like to share what I've seen / But it's been eight days in convalescent camp," sings James with affecting sensitivity. "Mother says she's not seen you lately / Please don't leave her alone…"

**TELL US MORE...**

The album was preceded by an EP, 'The Empress Way', and James says the whole project has given him a new-found appreciation for his grandfather's sacrifices. "The respect is on another level now," he exclaims. "It was fascinating to see his political mind develop, as he questioned the motives of those in command. After the war he became a big political activist, and those values are ingrained in the family now."

**BOB FISCHER**

**'The Empress Way' EP is out now. 'Post War Plans' is released on 20 October – both on Analogue Trash**

Andy Oppenheimer of **Oppenheimer Analysis** recalls the creation of their self-released 1982 synthpop gem **'The Devil's Dancers'**, which became a cult classic and dancefloor favourite when it was reissued on Veronica Vasicka's Minimal Wave label

**INTERVIEW: BEN MURPHY**

"I was working for a science and science fiction magazine called Omni. I went to sci-fi conventions as part of my job, and in those days I was a dead ringer for Bowie in 'The Man Who Fell To Earth'. In 1979, I went to one in Brighton, and that's where I met Martin Lloyd. He attended one of the parties for the writers, and he came over and chatted to me.

"The whole idea for the music came two years later. We used to go down to nightclubs together. I had friends who were going to Blitz club and Studio 21, and this was the period when electronic music was coming up. Martin had constructed his own home studio, and he got in touch to ask if I'd like to do some poems to music. I said, 'I don't want to do poems, mate. I want to do songs!'. I'd always wanted to be a pop singer. So we started composing music together.

"I would start off by writing the lyrics. I'd be on my way from one lab to another to see different scientists, and I'd sit in the back of the cab and write a song. I'd arrive at the studio, Martin would do all the arrangements, and I'd do the singing. We'd work it out together, and then he'd put it down to what I think in those days was an 8-track.

"The science fiction themes were very strong in that new romantic scene. We loved the imagery of the atomic age, 1950s comics and films, and that was what we embraced along with this very futuristic type of music, which was partly synthetic but also had a lot of emotion.

"The themes we wrote about were entirely atomic bomb-related. All those songs that we did in the very beginning were on the Oppenheimer theme. It seemed to go with the time. The series 'Oppenheimer' had come out on the BBC. I turned up at Martin's studio one day with the Bowie hat, the suit, I weighed nothing, I smoked like a chimney. Martin looked at me and said, 'Oppenheimer!'.

"I said, 'I know, I've been watching it, I'm really heavily into the story of the nuclear age. I want to research it, study it properly'. I said, 'Right, well that's the name for the band'. I think his project at the time was called Analysis, so that's how we came to put that rather unwieldy name together.

"Out of all of the songs I've done since, 'The Devil's Dancers' is the most popular. It's so bloody catchy, that thing. It took us less than an evening to do. The lyrics I wrote were based on what a particular scientist had said about the atomic bomb. He said it was 'dancing with the devil'.

"'Tickling the dragon's tail' was another term for when they were experimenting with plutonium cores. Bringing it all together without it exploding was an incredibly risky business.

"Dancing with the devil was the whole idea of making a nuclear weapon. I just said, 'The future's here said the pioneer', then it ended up being a wee pop lyric all the way through. It's like saying, 'Sod it mate, there's nothing you can do, so join in'. It was an amazing time when you could write a song like that – like OMD's 'Enola Gay' – and people would get up and dance to it.

"We finished Oppenheimer Analysis in 1984. By the 90s, I'd decided that I really wanted to do nuclear research. Time went on, suddenly 9/11 happened, and I'd worked for various publishers as an editor, producing books on space weapons and science. I'd already done a couple of exams on nuclear policy and I decided to go freelance. I got work as a writer and defence analyst, and was an author on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, explosives and bombs. I specialised in it as a lecturer, giving talks at defence conferences.

"Me and Martin didn't see each other for years. He got married and had kids. One day in 2005 I got an email from Janes, the publisher I was working for, saying, 'Are you some sort of pop star? We're being inundated with emails about a group you were in'. One of them was from Veronica Vasicka, who was setting up the Minimal Wave label and had been trying to get in touch with Martin and me to reissue our music. I told Martin, and he was so thrilled. We got together again and met Veronica, who came over from New York.

"Somehow, our music had got to nightclubs in places like Belgium where DJs were playing 'The Devil's Dancers'. Minimal Wave is celebrating 18 years this year, and Veronica might release a special EP of Oppenheimer Analysis because of the 'Oppenheimer' film.

"By 2011, we weren't recording anymore. We'd done our last live show in London, as Martin became ill. I had begun work with Mahk Rumbae in Vienna as Oppenheimer MKII. Martin died quite suddenly. I really miss him. He would have loved all this business about the film – he'd have been the first in the queue at the IMAX and would have said to me, 'You've got to wear your hat!'.

"This particular period and this particular music seems amazingly to still keep coming up from time to time. Since the 'Oppenheimer' film came out, people have suddenly been tweeting and messaging me, talking about those early songs. It's a delight. It really is. Because I've been doing a lot of music on and off since those days, but this has endured and it's quite remarkable. I'm still astounded by that."

**A reissue of the first Oppenheimer MKII album, 'The Presence Of The Abnormal', is out now on Klanggalerie. The group play at FLUC in Vienna on 27 October**

## CONTROL FREQ

### Argentine MIDI controllers to drool over

Yaeltex are a company inviting customers to design their ideal MIDI controller from scratch using their snazzy online designer tool. Based in Patagonia, they recently teamed up with Swedish producer Sebastian Mullaert to make a pair of custom controllers named Conductor and Jammer, with the former offering 12 channels for "sketching" ideas as well as effects routing to those channels, and the latter for software instruments and MIDI output gear, primed for looping and sequencing. Sure to light up your set-up, you can order each separately or get both in a $2,148 bundle. **yaeltex.com**

## BANGING ON

More random musings from **Fat Roland**. On his mind this month (as far as we can tell) is **Poetry**

In the words of the great Rudyard Kipling, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, something something waffle waffle… you'll be a flan, my son." I guess that's why he made exceedingly good cakes.

Poetry is one of our greatest art forms. Even more bestest than opera, ice sculptures and colouring books. Before Richard Branson invented vinyl records, there were only three possible hobbies. Number one: rolling a hoop with a stick down a coal mine. Number two: trying to win at hopscotch before your legs fell off from bubonic plague. Number three: being a poet like Keats or, er, one of the other famous poets. Essential accessories for an olde-timey poet included a quill, parchment, ruffs, smelling salts and RhymeZone.com.

Anyone can produce a poetry pamphlet. Write a load of hot garbage about rivers and puppies. All in Comic Sans. Then hand-bind it with string and chewing gum. Call it something like 'Gushing Feelings' or 'The Syphilis Diaries'. Make sure you proofread it. Publishing anything without having it profread first is so irrisponsable.

People into electronic music don't understand poetry. I'll give you an example. Give me a word that rhymes with Moog, the legendary synthesiser manufacturer. Rogue? Fugue? Droog? Kylie Minogue? No-one knows. We don't even know how to pronounce Depeche Mode. There's a reason why synthesiser keys only go from A to G. Any more letters and our brains would exploge. Er, I mean, explode.

Thank your lucky trousers for rhyming acts like Annie Lennox and Ultravox. Or Yello and, er, Devo. Or New Order and, um, oh heck, Giorgio Mor-order?! The ultimate stanza bonanza is the Mancunian techno act 808 State. 808 rhymes with State, and State rhymes with 808, and it also works upside-down so that's four rhymes right there. They had a hit single called 'The Only Rhyme That Bites' which taught us to never put our finger in MC Tunes' mouth.

I know, I know, poetry doesn't need to rhyme. Sometimes it has words like "flange" and "kerfuffle", the two most unusual words in the English language apart from "sigue", "sigue" and "sputnik". A sub-genre of poetry is visual poetry, where words on the page form patterns. It's dead clever. If you squint at this column, the text will blur into a shape of a desperate idiot ranting at a laptop on deadline day. Just sublime.

I'll leave you with the greatest rhyme in electronic music history. No, not The Human League matching "tall tall tall" with "wall wall wall". Not even Snap! pairing "dancer" with "cancer". The peak poetry plaudit goes to 2 Unlimited who rhymed "techno" with "techno" with "techno" and "techno". A heartbreaking work of staggering genius. They should be writing this column.

Global Communication's **Tom Middleton** remembers meeting a teenage **Richard D James**, who looked like a member of Bros and was conducting "binaural neuroscience experiments" in his bedroom

**WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH**

It was in the quaint Cornish village of Crantock, two miles west of Newquay, where Tom Middleton first met Richard D James.

"The Bowgie Inn in Crantock was where we all went to in the late 1980s," says Middleton, formerly of Global Communication, who nowadays works solo as GCOM. "The room had this rough Turbosound system and held around 150 to 200 people, albeit illegally. The late, great DJ Paul Guntrip would come down every couple of Fridays and play a selection of import records – Chicago house, New York garage, as it was called then, Detroit techno… and then you had Belgian new beat, early rave sounds, as well as Dutch and German records.

"Suddenly there was this mix of really cool stuff, and we started to get a sense that there was a shift here – people were making music as a response to these imports coming in, and going to the clubs you got a taste for it."

For a village with a population of less than 800 people, The Bowgie was an intriguing, if unlikely, meeting place of forward-leaning sonic activity. Located deep in the heart of Cornwall, it's where Middleton rubbed shoulders with the likes of schoolmate Luke Vibert, Rephlex Records co-founder Grant Wilson-Claridge, and Piers "PK" Kirwan, now a veteran DJ, who ran a fortnightly acid and techno night with a young whippersnapper going by the name of Richard James.

But pre-Aphex, even pre-Power-Pill, James looked a little different from the ginger-bearded rave hippy we're so familiar with these days…

"Do you remember Bros?" asks Middleton, grinning. "One Saturday night, there was this really coiffured guy, wearing a leather jacket and a kind of 1950s slick quiff, with short cut denim jeans and Doc Martens. Richard was wearing that outfit – hilarious! His fans will be like, 'What?!'.

"We're on the dancefloor listening to some tunes from around that time, and then all of a sudden he plays this format that's much faster, almost like proto-breakbeat. We lost our minds! It was the most manic SH-101 hacked acid squelch, distorted mindfuck, and then he slammed in a Julie Andrews sample halfway through. It was ridiculous!"

James had played 'Human Rotation' – a truly stonking breakbeat track sampling 'The Sound Of Music', which only saw the light of day in 2017 after a load of unreleased Aphex tracks were mysteriously dumped online.

Middleton says he beelined it straight to the decks and quickly got chatting to James about the music he'd just played (while also discovering they share the same birthday). James then asked if Middleton wanted to check out what he was working on at his home studio.

"I went to Richard's house and in his bedroom, lo and behold, he's got two speakers suspended from the ceiling on wire chains," he remembers.

"Richard was 18 or 19 years old, and he had already found out that isolating speakers by hanging them from the ceiling was going to create a better sound.

Middleton is clearly still in awe of what he witnessed.

"The lid was off the Roland SH-101, and he'd got a screwdriver and had attacked the potentiometer for the filter frequency range, he continues. "Roland had delivered this 20 hertz to 20 kilohertz range, which is roughly the human hearing perception range. He went subsonic, down below that, and then he increased the top to beyond 20 kilohertz, effectively creating a unique SH-101 that was now a signal generator. A scientific tool.

"We would experiment, and he'd show me what it was capable of, like sending a single one hertz sine wave into the speakers. So we were sitting there doing binaural neuroscience experiments, without knowing it! But it was exactly that – binaural beat entrainment."

Within the context of producing electronic music, the pair were, in effect, creating their own informal curriculum for studying the physics of sound, and making up their own worlds if they fancied it. That playfulness would become integral to the life of James' work as Aphex Twin.

"We were blissfully ignorant but also curious," explains Middleton. "We joked about doing ultrasound and bats hitting the window, or upsetting dolphins in the sea. Obviously that's the fun part of Richard's mind – 'Let's expand on what's real and what's not. Let's communicate with bats and dolphins' – and I liked that.

"He'd go out into his garage and make beats by literally bashing cardboard boxes and bits of metal, recording to tape, then sampling them on a Casio FZ, pitching them up and down to make a new beat. That's when I learned the art of creative sampling."

Even after Middleton had left for art school, James continued to share his latest experiments with him and other friends through mix tapes.

"I was driving to the beach one day, and I put the mix tape on and heard 'Analogue Bubblebath' for the first time," says Middleton. "The breakdown was almost spiritual, and I still think it's pretty much peerless even now. There are instances in tracks today when I think producers have got it – I think Scuba has done it a couple of times, and some electronic artists can get to this moment of pure serotonin euphoria in sonics. But the harmony and frequency spectrum Richard found with that particular track – he made an SH-101 go 'dooo dooo dooo', *melodically*. Phenomenal!

"And the tracks around that time somehow had the essence of what started to become rave and breakbeat, but he approached it slightly differently. He wasn't thinking in terms of The Prodigy. He wasn't thinking in terms of novelty. And then he made the 'Pac-Man' tune, and then… fuck."

PULSE

## JAN SOUTSCHEK

German electronicist plays in nature

### WHO?

Jan Soutschek is an artist from Leipzig specialising in the audacious pursuit of genre traversal. Sometimes going under the name Soček, his first two Bandcamp releases were mysterious reworks of folky laments – David Campbell's 'Splinters Of The Tree', and Peggy Seeger's 'Emily' – while his debut solo EP 'Teoculcán' comprised three tracks which can only be described as downtempo though uncompromising explorations of the jungle. That's not jungle music, but quite literally jungle noises, with the piece built around manipulated vocal samples, tweets, hisses, growls and synthesisers that scratch and skitter like creepy-crawlies. It's nothing short of mesmerising.

### WHY JAN SOUTSCHEK?

Soutschek released his debut album 'Cycles' earlier in 2023, and it's vastly different from anything he has previously offered listeners. Built around 10 recordings of a pedal steel guitar which he bought from a retired folk musician, the album trips and weaves its way through gently trickling melodies, beatless atmospherics and ambient noise, inviting listeners to experience full-on serenity and peace of mind. The pedal steel guitar that features so heavily on 'Cycles' might have required both the artist's arms and legs to play, but the effect sounds effortless. You wonder where Soutschek will go from here.

### TELL US MORE...

Aside from his location, Soutschek's background is a well-kept secret, which does make his releases that little bit more enigmatic. One thing we do know, however, is that he was a member of the duo JaJa (his label YNFND describes him as the "lower half" of the group) with fellow Leipzig-resident Jascha Haren, whose own solo work teeters more towards the deep house side of electronic music.

**IMOGEN BEBB**

**'Cycles' is out now on YNFND**

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

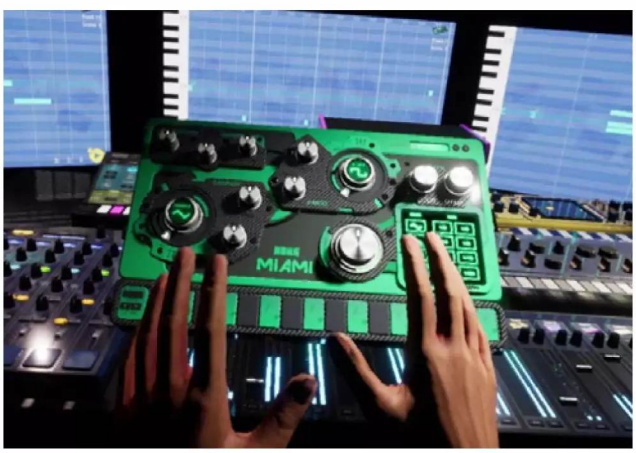
Miniature Japanese powerhouse up for grabs

"Proudly digital and dangerously different." That's how Tokyo's Sonicware described their ELZ_1 synthesiser – a powerful OP-1-esque portable instrument with a dozen unique synth engines, onboard effects and more. The global pandemic and ensuing component shortage curtailed its production, but company founder Dr Yu Endo has now taken it upon himself to resurrect the ELZ_1 as the ELZ_1 Play, presenting a revamped design, more synth engines, a velocity-sensitive keyboard and a 4-track looper. Scheduled to ship in December for just £469 apiece, you can support the project now by placing a preorder. **dr.yuendo.jp**

## VIRTUAL-OSO

Korg gadget goes fully virtual

The Gadget VR is Korg's latest addition to their Gadget music production suite and plug-in collection. It promises producers a unique experience where they can don a VR headset to immerse themselves in all six newly rendered versions of virtual instruments. Presumably more are set to follow, but the current repertoire includes the London Hypersonic PCM Drum Module, the Kiev Advanced Spatial Digital Synthesiser and the Miami Wobble Synth which have all been redesigned for ease of virtual use. What's more, the Gadget VR's mirroring feature allows users to perform the music they've made virtually for others, alongside a real-time video feed of their "studio". VR goggles not included, of course, but at £22.99, who's complaining? Not us. **korg.com**



## GIMME THE LOOT

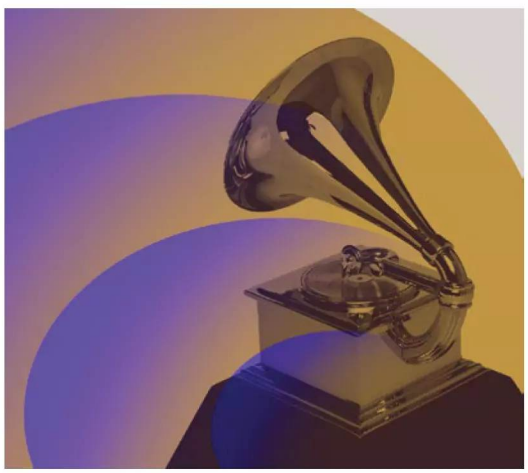
### Eclectic indie celebrates double figures

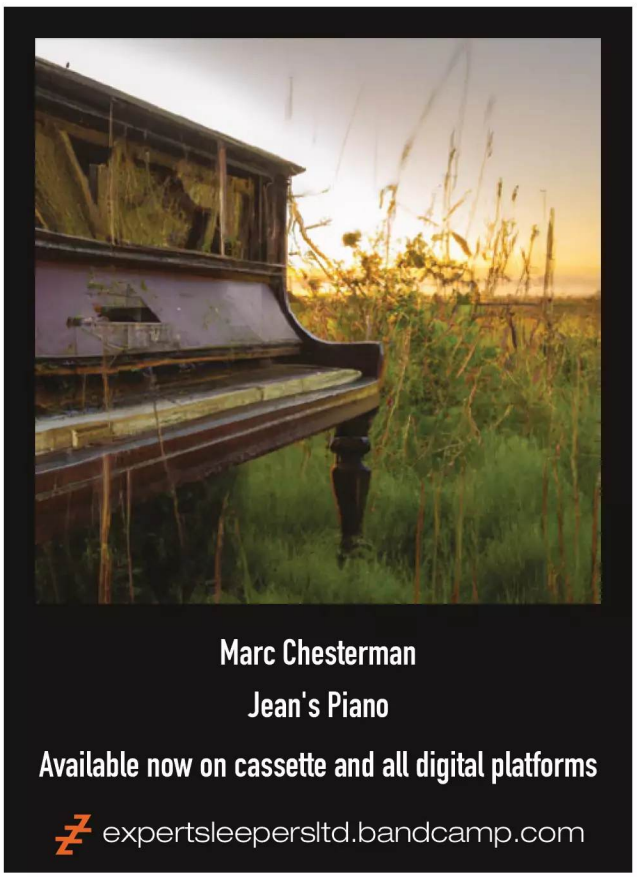
It's been 10 years since Alan Gubby launched his Buried Treasure label, and in that time it has become a much-loved vault of stellar music from across the cosmic spectrum. To mark the occasion, Gubby is throwing an anniversary party on Saturday 14 October "underneath a brutalist 1960s car park in Bracknell new town", but to gain entry, you'll need to buy BT's anniversary compilation album, 'Decapoda', which is out now. Each physical copy includes a special birthday guest pass. **buriedtreasure.bandcamp.com**

## WE ARE THE ROBOTS

### Grammys recognise music made with AI

Last month the Recording Academy announced that music created using artificial intelligence will be eligible for Grammy nominations in 2024. But before you start binning all your studio equipment, it's important to note that the organisation have stressed that only "human creators" can be nominated for awards, and that "a work containing no human authorship is not eligible in any category". Intriguingly, the decision came just three days after Paul McCartney revealed that the last Beatles record was composed using artificial intelligence to extract John Lennon's voice from an old demo – the latest twist in the ever-deepening AI story. Either way, it's here to stay, so buckle up and get ready. **grammy.com**





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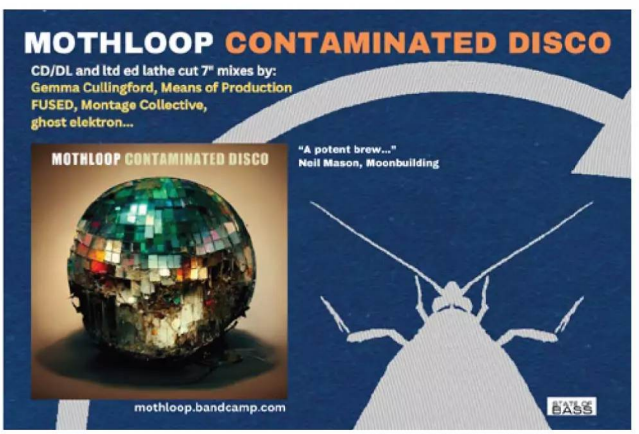
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# GAME OF DRONES

AS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND DEPECHE MODE, YAZOO, THE ASSEMBLY, ERASURE AND COUNTLESS OTHER PROJECTS OVER FOUR DECADES, YOU MIGHT THINK YOU'VE GOT SYNTHPOP PIONEER VINCE CLARKE SUSSED. BUT HIS DEBUT SOLO ALBUM, THE EVOCATIVE 'SONGS OF SILENCE', IS A MAJOR SURPRISE. BUILT AROUND DRONES AND AMBIENT SOUNDSCAPES, IT'S AN UNEXPECTED AND MAJESTIC LEFT-FIELD TURN. HE TALKS US THROUGH ITS GESTATION AND REFLECTS ON A REMARKABLE CAREER

WORDS: VELIMIR ILIC

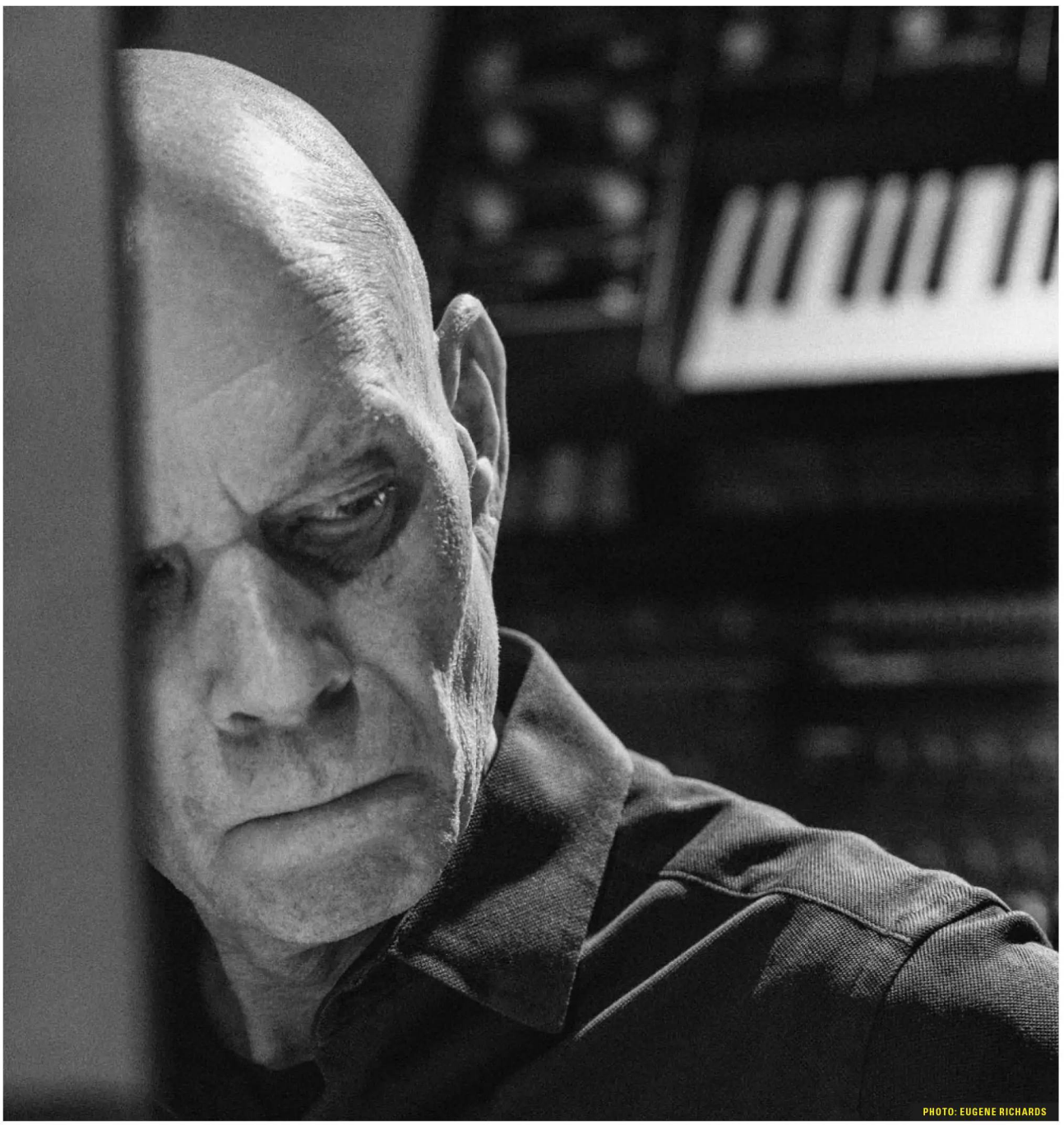


PHOTO: EUGENE RICHARDS

It's a sweltering Monday afternoon in New York, and I'm on my way to meet revered electronic whizz Vince Clarke. Wilting in the heat and feeling a little discombobulated, I'm walking down the quiet, tree-lined Brooklyn street where Clarke lives with his American wife and son, looking up at the imposing brownstone townhouses with their grand facades and trying to take it all in. It feels slightly surreal to think that in a few moments, I'll be face-to-face with the man himself, the "quiet genius" behind Depeche Mode, Yazoo and Erasure.

I walk up the steps to Clarke's house and knock. He answers the door and, after a quick introduction, leads me through a hallway and straight down the stairs to his venerated basement studio. My heart is thumping – this is the engine room, where the magic happens. I've seen plenty of photos of it online but it feels much more intimidating and impressive up-close.

Banks of analogue synths, machines and key bits of kit line the wood-panelled walls, including the ARP 2600 and ARP Sequencer – extensively used on Depeche Mode's 'Speak & Spell' – and Clarke's trusty Sequential Circuits Pro-One, which features on all of Erasure's albums. Lots of little spotlights are dotted around, accentuating the slightly dream-like nature of the scene.

We take a seat at the central table on which his computer sits – right at the heart of the controls, no less – and Clarke pours himself a beer. It's a space he seems very comfortable and relaxed in, as he should. With his set-up streamlined for ease of use, he knows every bit of it intimately. Even now, almost 40 years down the line, he still gets a buzz from the process.

"I got rid of all of the stuff I never used, so everything in here is working and connected to the computer," he explains. "And it's always accessible. I can spend all my time just twiddling knobs, to see what happens. I'm down here maybe six or seven hours a day, but not in one go. It varies – I was in here at two o'clock this morning, messing about."

First and foremost, we're here to talk about Vince Clarke's debut solo album, 'Songs Of Silence'. Built on sonorous drones, Klaus Schulze-esque atmospherics and ambient hues, with nods to folk and opera, it's a truly astonishing and expansive piece of work that's both contemplative and poignant – and a world apart from the consummate electropop on which he's forged an entire career. After more than four decades, the obvious question is… why now?

"Well, after the first leg of the last Erasure tour, Andy Bell tested positive for Covid and I got stuck in a fucking hotel for 10 days, so that was basically the end of that," he says, matter-of-factly. "Then I found myself in lockdown with nothing to do."

Duly ensconced in his basement studio, Clarke did what has come naturally for over 40 years – tinker. But this time it felt different. Trying to stay busy, and with few external distractions, he began to properly acquaint himself with Eurorack. Although the modular synth had been sitting in his studio for years, he'd never fully explored it.

"A lot of it works on the same principle as some of the modular stuff I have here, but there's so much more it can do," he reasons. "I couldn't learn a synth without having some reason to do that. There's an endgame, which is me getting a fantastic sound that will fit into a particular track."

With plenty of time on his hands, online tutorials became a new-found source of fascination and an integral part of his creative journey.

"I can watch people demonstrating Eurorack modules on YouTube forever," he says, deadpan. "I really, really enjoy it."

Isolation also gave him the space to start work on his solo album. As the sounds he generated began to take shape and evolve into what would become 'Songs Of Silence', he found himself becoming increasingly immersed in his own soundscapes.

"I just got into drones, with nothing particularly happening – I spent a lot of time making them change and morph," he reflects. "With those kinds of interactions, you can't just hit a button and suddenly everything sounds great… you have to really, really listen. And it wasn't like I was under any pressure. I started experimenting, adding bits and pieces, some texture."

Clarke imposed two rules – sounds could only be generated from Eurorack, and each track had to revolve around a single note in the same key.

"I wanted it to have structure, but at the same time I liked the idea of everything being in one note," he says. "I was quite happy listening to a track without a groove, being enveloped in a soundscape."

What inspired the title of the record? Why 'Songs Of Silence'?

"It's just something that came to me," he says. "Obviously, there's the Simon & Garfunkel song, 'The Sound Of Silence', which is one of my favourite tracks. But I just felt those words had this kind of sadness and seriousness."

You're a big Paul Simon fan, right?

"Yeah, absolutely," he says. "I wouldn't have got into music had it not been for Paul Simon."

More so than Kraftwerk, say?

"Totally. Only because Paul Simon had an album called 'The Paul Simon Song Book' with just him on acoustic guitar. And I thought, 'Oh, I can do that'. But with someone like Kraftwerk, you have no idea how they get that sound."

The roots of Clarke's solo album can be traced right back to some of his earlier work with Martyn Ware, who he's been friends with for years. After Ware produced Erasure's 1994 long-player, 'I Say, I Say, I Say', the pair co-founded sound design company Illustrious, although Clarke is more of a sleeping partner these days. They also made two excellent albums of glacial ambient soundscapes – 1999's 'Pretentious' as The Clarke And Ware Experiment, and 2001's 'Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle' under their own names.

"Martyn and I did some soundscapes for the doomed National Centre For Popular Music in Sheffield about 25 years ago," recalls Clarke. "One of the installations was this surround sound listening room. That's really when I first started getting interested in the idea of making ambient music."

'Songs Of Silence' certainly has a sombre atmosphere. Clarke describes these wordless narratives as having a sense of sorrow, of "things going bad and crumbling" – a reflection, perhaps, of the bleak lockdown environment in which they were made. But, make no mistake, it's a hugely exhilarating and euphoric listening experience.

Turned up loud through headphones for maximum effect, the opening track, 'Cathedral', subsumes you with its resonant bass drone and lingering synth sweeps, emerging from darkness into radiant bright light. It feels like you're flying through the air, arms outstretched, as free as a bird. The spell is broken by 'White Rabbit' – inspired by the scurrying character in 'Alice In Wonderland' – as a babbling sequencer suddenly morphs into full- on tribal drums. Then, we get the shimmering 'Passage', featuring operatic vocals from Caroline Joy, as beautiful as it is stirring. It's breathless stuff.

"I didn't really have an idea when I started how the tracks were going to sound," admits Clarke. "But on 'Passage', I could really hear this human voice in my head – I liked the idea of it sounding 'operatic'. I was listening to a couple of things… Malcolm McLaren's 'Fans', one of my all-time favourite albums, and then I got tuned into Puccini's 'Tosca'. There was one particular aria on it, and I thought, 'Well, that's an interesting selection of notes'. So I got in touch with Caroline on Fiverr."

One of the most moving cuts on 'Songs Of Silence' is 'The Lamentations Of Jeremiah'. Inspired by Jeremiah (the "weeping prophet"), who authored the Book Of Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible, it's underpinned by a heavy drone and features cello by Clarke's good friend, Reed Hays.

"I was trying to make it sound cinematic, whatever that means," says Clarke. "Reed's an amazing player, the real deal. He spent a few days listening to the track and working out scales that fitted with the harmonics, then just did it as a one-off performance. I think it's the most emotional track on the album."

'Blackleg', meanwhile, is probably the album's most intriguing track. Featuring a vocal sample from a recording of the 1844 anti-scab folk song, 'Blackleg Miner', it's remarkably powerful, with nebulous synths conveying the "cover of darkness under which the scab steals away to work". Covered by various artists over the years, most famously Steeleye Span, the original version of 'Blackleg Miner' is considered controversial, due to its brutal depiction of violence against strike-breakers.

"I was given a copy of that audio by Martyn Ware about 15 years ago," explains Clarke. "I tried to work out the chord progression, but the timing's all over the shop because it's a cappella – I couldn't put it into a rigid timeframe. But then I had this track that happened to be in the right key, weirdly. So I played the vocal audio over it. All I did was time it a bit better so the verses sat evenly. That's why I could never work out the chord changes because there aren't any – you don't need them."

Once the album was finished, Clarke sent it to Mute boss Daniel Miller, even though – incredibly – he wasn't sure whether Miller would like it. His fears, of course, were unfounded.

"He came back to me quite quickly and said, 'I really like this… I want to release it'. I was shocked, because I thought, 'Well, it's certainly not Erasure, and it's definitely not as weird as Sunroof' [laughs]. For that reason, I thought it was something that he wouldn't be particularly interested in. So I was very surprised when he wanted to release it."

Often referred to as the "quiet genius", Clarke generally prefers to work behind the scenes. How does he feel putting himself in the spotlight with this album?

"It's very strange," he admits. "The first weirdness came when I had to name the tracks – prior to me doing that, it was just 'Drone 1' to 'Drone 10'. With Erasure, Andy always takes care of that stuff – he sings the lyrics and writes most of them, so obviously he's coming up with the titles. It took me a while to get used to making decisions about artwork and things that I normally wouldn't bother with! [laughs]."

Given the different way of working on 'Songs Of Silence', does he enjoy taking himself out of his comfort zone and embracing new challenges?

"I think that's much easier as you get older," he says. "Because it's not like you're worrying about chart positions particularly, and you can certainly experiment more. You're not trying to make something sound outrageous or unlistenable. I like the idea of having a track that's quite conventional, and then interspersing it with things that are jarring or aren't musical. It's a bit like a chord change – you can build up a chord progression, and it has lots of tension and even things that are slightly wrong. But if you go back into the main body of the song, then suddenly it's a relief. I like the emotional whoosh you get in your head from that."

As an impressionable teenager seduced by the thrilling synth sounds happening in 1981 – the year that electronic pop really took off – I was lured in and shaped by Vince Clarke's direct, effervescent songs right from the start. Seeing Depeche Mode perform the ridiculously catchy 'New Life' on 'Top Of The Pops', with Clarke jabbing away at his keyboard, was a crucial moment in my music education.

At school, the excitement was palpable. 'New Life' was on everyone's lips. It was one of the first "hip" singles that all the cool kids bought, swiftly followed by the equally zippy 'Just Can't Get Enough'. Clarke has always had the enviable knack of being able to conjure and bash out great tunes, like an electropop mage. Given the documented influences on early Depeche – pre-'Dare' Human League, OMD, Fad Gadget and others – was there a lightbulb moment in terms of electronic music that set him off?

"OMD was the one," he says. "I was a teenager when we first heard 'Electricity', me and my friends. It was one of those things where I thought, 'Perhaps making music or making a record is within my grasp'. It was very simple and there weren't lots of massive synths and expensive gear, but OMD had really great tunes and ideas. I thought I could maybe tap into that. Also, I'm a terrible guitar player – I learned just enough chords to be able to write a song."

It was actually 'Almost', the B-side of 'Electricity', that really hooked Clarke in. He even ended up remixing the track in 2016, which he describes as "a great honour".

Back in the pre-Depeche days in Basildon, Clarke and Andy Fletcher formed nascent bands such as 1977's No Romance In China and 1980's Composition Of Sound, and were soon joined by Martin Gore and Dave Gahan. They became Depeche Mode in September 1980, with Gahan nabbing the name from a French fashion magazine. Clarke was engaged and driven, but there was no plan – the band's vision was purely reactive.

"It was all basically one day to the next," recalls Clarke. "When Depeche Mode started, we would get a gig at a pub, we'd do it, and then we'd get an offer to play another pub. I thought, 'That's good'. And perhaps the pub or venue after that would be slightly bigger."

Having built a following in and around Basildon, Depeche Mode were supporting Fad Gadget at the Bridge House in London's Canning Town in November 1980. It turned out to be a pivotal moment. Daniel Miller had been watching their performance and was impressed enough to ask them afterwards if they wanted to make a single. After some to-ing and fro-ing, they agreed, and the ball was rolling.

"We couldn't believe that we were with a record company," recalls Clarke. "And then we brought out the 'Dreaming Of Me' single which got played on the radio – we couldn't believe that, either. There was no one thinking ahead, 'Oh, this is the way we're gonna go, this is how we're going to end up'. It literally was one day at a time."

Written by Clarke, 'Dreaming Of Me' got to Number 57 in the UK Singles Chart in early 1981. He also penned most of the tracks for Depeche's 1981 debut album, 'Speak & Spell', including breakthrough hit singles 'New Life' and 'Just Can't Get Enough'. Things were looking up, the future looked bright. But Clarke's time in Depeche Mode would be woefully short – there were already signs of discord, with Clarke feeling disconnected from what was happening around him. Despite critical acclaim for the band's first releases, he abruptly upped and left.

Over the years, the possible reasons for his stepping away have been touched on – musical differences, Clarke growing tired of touring and promotional duties, and wanting more control – but it's never been properly documented. So what's the definitive story?

"I've got a few pretend ones," he sniggers. Clarke's sense of humour is very dry, so you occasionally have to take what he says with a very big pinch of salt.

"Me and Martin Gore did that minimal techno record together [2012's excellent 'Ssss', as VCMG]," he continues. "We were talking to a journalist in America, doing interviews – which was sweet, I really enjoyed it – but I couldn't stop myself. He asked, 'Why did you leave Depeche?', and I said, 'Well, I was involved in a car accident and I had a really quite serious leg injury. In the end, it just became too much, and I realised I could no longer be a member of Depeche Mode because I couldn't stand behind a synth onstage without falling over'.

"The truth is, I really don't remember. I honestly think it all happened so quickly for us, and there were lots of egos flying around – mostly mine. I was a control freak, for sure. When I decided to leave, it wasn't like I was thinking, 'I'm going to go on and do something else'. I just didn't want to do *this* anymore. I assumed I'd go back to working for British Rail again, forever."

I sense this might be an opportune moment to talk about Depeche co-founder Andy Fletcher, who died unexpectedly in May last year. He and Clarke had known each other since their schooldays.

"We were at different schools – enemy schools," recalls Clarke. "There would be fights organised. Really funny, really stupid. Little kids, 11 and 12 years old.

He pauses for a moment.

"You know, he and I hadn't spoken… we weren't close, really. We were obviously very close when we started Depeche Mode. I'd seen him a few times over the years and we always got on fine. But it came out of the blue for everybody. It was quite a shock."

They must have shared a lot of formative experiences, I suggest. What's Clarke's best memory of Fletch?

"Fletcher was always full of advice for everybody," he says. "He had a very funny sense of humour… no, funny's the wrong word. If you didn't know Fletcher, then you wouldn't think it was funny. If you knew Fletcher, then it was really, *really* funny.

"Even though we didn't socialise regularly, we're the same crowd – all from Basildon, all the same age. In the beginning, Fletcher and I got together to try and make music like The Cure. He bought a bass guitar, I had a guitar, and we had an amp and a drum machine. We'd spend ages in my mum's bedroom or garage, trying to learn what chords were and write songs. That was when we were 17 and 18. I'll always remember that – they were good times. Fletcher was really keen to learn, and I didn't know much!"

Fast-forward to the present day. Does Clarke take an interest in what Depeche Mode are doing now?

"Yeah, I'd heard they were releasing the 'Ghosts Again' single shortly after Fletcher died," he says. "The video is really… super-moving. I always like to keep tabs on what they're doing musically and what Martin's up to with his sounds, because he's such a brilliant synthesist – he always comes up with interesting shit."

Having worked with Gore as VCMG, Clarke says he would love to hook up with his former bandmate again in the future.

"I don't know that Martin would be able to find the time, or perhaps he might not want to do it. But I enjoyed what we did together, it was fun. If the opportunity comes along, then definitely. He's a very nice guy."

No grudges held, then. It's tempting to look back and wonder what might have been had he stuck around in Depeche, but he's not one to think too deeply about the past.

"You've got to move on," he asserts. "I'm sure I've said some horrible things to people before and made terrible decisions, but I'm not really dwelling on those. No regrets."

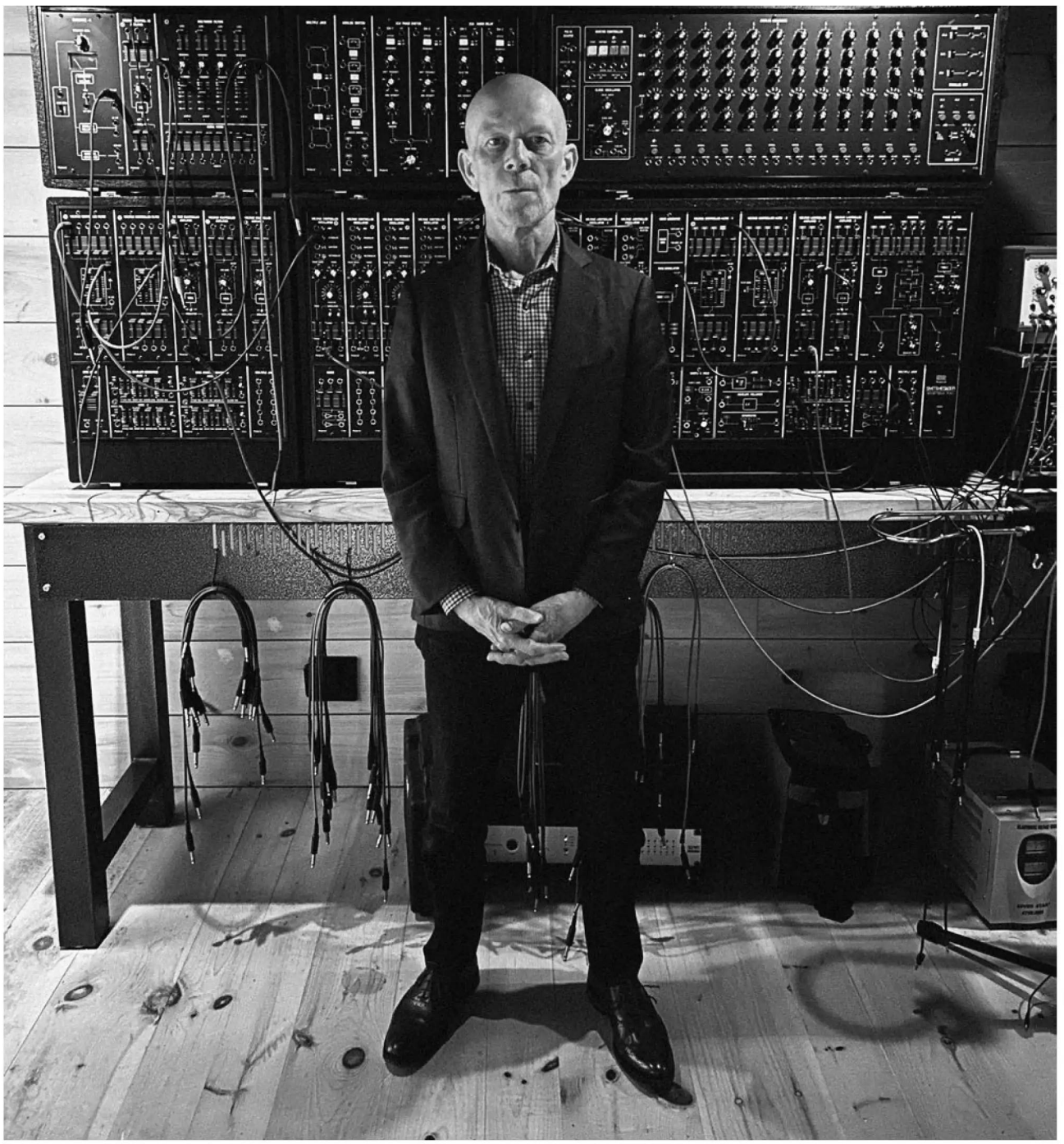
After leaving Depeche Mode, Clarke claims he had no immediate or defined vision.

"I had no expectations whatsoever," he shrugs. "I wanted to make music, for sure, and I started writing new songs. I've written songs since I was 15. Had I gone back to British Rail, I would still be writing music. It's the same with this solo project. I didn't really do it with the idea of releasing it, because I get enough satisfaction now just making it. It's a real joy."

But his pop trajectory was about to take another upward curve, this time under the guise of Yazoo with Alison Moyet, who he vaguely knew from Basildon. The story has been told often enough – Moyet had put an advert in Melody Maker, looking for a blues-based band, and Clarke needed a singer. Despite their differences, the stars somehow aligned. Musically, Yazoo had real energy and synchronicity, with Clarke's synthpop earworms the perfect foil to Moyet's husky contralto.

"I had this one song, 'Only You', that I'd written," recalls Clarke. "I'd heard Alison sing in a punk band called The Vandals, which my best friend was a member of, so I just approached her. We met in person and she sang the demo, which I'd written on a little 4-track Portastudio. Then we took it to Daniel Miller."

Miller's initial reaction, however, was somewhat aloof.



"It was quite funny, on reflection," says Clarke, smiling. "Mute had an office in London, which was basically a storefront. I went there with a cassette of my demo, and he was messing about with his ARP synth. He took five minutes to listen to the track – and then just went back to his ARP. At the same time, my publisher and a few others came in and happened to hear the song, while Daniel just continued twiddling his knobs. They said, 'We think this is a really good track'. Daniel then made the decision to release it as a single. And that's all I expected."

There was no Yazoo album in the offing at that point. But it was the success of 'Only You' that led to the 1982 long-player 'Upstairs At Eric's' – named in honour of producer Eric Radcliffe, in whose Blackwing Studios complex it was made, in south-east London.

"It wasn't like Mute had loads of money, so when the single did well, Daniel decided he would pay for the recording of an album," says Clarke. "He was just being very practical. We weren't dealing with CBS or anything, there were no advances or money for any of the artists, really. It was basically a track at a time."

Released in March 1982, 'Only You' was a massive hit – further proof of Clarke's songwriting chops. There were four more singles, but beneath the surface, the tension between him and Moyet was beginning to bubble over. 1983's well-received 'You And Me Both' album was made under sufferance by Clarke, as his publisher thought it wouldn't look good if he were to leave another band so quickly. Yazoo split acrimoniously, citing personality clashes and a lack of communication. Clarke and Moyet later reunited for 2008's 'Reconnected' tour, but it was too little, too late.

Following Yazoo's demise, Clarke embarked on another short-lived and ill-fated project – The Assembly, with Eric Radcliffe – but after just one hit single, 'Never Never' with Feargal Sharkey, that bit the dust too.

"I thought we would get more out of it than we did," admits Clarke now. "And I really enjoyed working with Eric Radcliffe – he was an incredible engineer and producer, and I learned a huge amount from him. I could write the songs, but it was very difficult to find singers that were interested in singing them."

Given Clarke's previous success, you'd have thought they would be queuing up.

"Well, the singers that we really liked were all songwriters, and they weren't necessarily interested in singing other people's songs," he says. "We spoke to a few people and recorded some of them. Neil Arthur was on one of the songs and Matt Johnson from The The, people that we kind of knew. But after that it all just folded, really."

Having moved to Brooklyn around 20 years ago, Clarke seems to have immersed himself in life here. The next day, I've agreed to meet him at his favourite local bar, Gowanus Gardens, a laid-back "neighbourhood mainstay". Co-owned by a friend of his, it has the air of a welcoming London boozer. Clarke is already there and chatting away when I arrive, so we grab drinks and head to the outside courtyard, where it's quieter.

Talk immediately turns to Clarke's most successful and defining project – Erasure. By far his longest stint, it's astonishing to think that he and singer Andy Bell have been going since 1985. So many memorable singles – 'Sometimes', 'The Circus', 'A Little Respect', 'Blue Savannah', 'Stop!'… well-crafted and accessible electronic hits. After the previous false starts with Depeche, Yazoo and The Assembly, Clarke puts Erasure's longevity down to mostly being "very lucky" and "because we write quite good songs". Crucially, he says, they initially built a following in the UK, USA and Germany by playing small places where the crowds gradually got bigger. He cites Andy Bell's showmanship as a key factor, too.

"Absolutely, yeah," agrees Clarke. "It didn't take long for him to become this onstage persona."

Erasure represents one of the few points in Clarke's career where he seems genuinely settled and happy. After the fleeting and troublesome relationships with Depeche Mode and Alison Moyet, the working relationship between him and Andy Bell has remained consistently strong. Bell currently spends half the year in Miami, Florida, and the other half in London. Although they try to catch up whenever possible, the pair mostly see each other for writing and recording.

"We just get on, really – Andy's very low-key and we have similar ideas about politics and similar tastes in music," says Clarke, by way of explanation. "He doesn't take himself too seriously, and I think that rubbed off on me a little, especially when the first record didn't happen as we would have liked it to. He has a very laid-back attitude about everything. In the beginning he was super-shy – even with me, not just the audiences – but over the years we've got to know each other. It turns out we quite like each other.

"I think he was intimidated at the start because we were in this fancy studio with a fancy producer. But Flood and I made a big effort to try and make him feel at ease. On our first album, 'Wonderland', all we did was laugh – it was one stupid joke after the next. Part of the reason for that was because we were overcompensating to make Andy feel more comfortable."

After so many years, does he still get that same sense of fulfilment working on Erasure material?

"I love it," he says, unequivocally. "Nowadays, with synthesisers, the sky's the limit. You can just keep going forever and ever. The best part about it is when Andy and I get together and write a song because we don't have preconceived ideas or a plan – just a blank piece of paper. And then after an hour or two you get something that appears out of that. It's a miracle, it really is."

And despite the stop-start nature of his early career, Clarke has stayed with Mute throughout. That's proper loyalty. What's the appeal?

"Well, it's the coolest label in the UK," he shoots back. "Daniel really is a huge music fan. The stuff that comes out on Mute is all over the shop, and very inspiring. We have a real one-on-one personal relationship. We never signed any contracts, it was just a handshake, all done on trust. The deal is, 'You make the record, we'll pay for 50 per cent. After costs, we split the profit'. Same as all the old Rough Trade deals, back in the day – that's what Daniel based it on."

When Depeche Mode were first finding their feet and recording at Blackwing, Miller would advise Clarke on how to arrange songs, use the studio technology and get specific sounds. In many ways, the Mute founder has become something of a mentor over the years.

"Our relationship's really changed," says Clarke. "When we first met him, he was so much older. Then you get older yourself, and that separation gets less and less. I love Daniel, he's such a good bloke – so supportive, and always interested in what you're up to. And now he's making music himself again, so we've always got something to talk about."

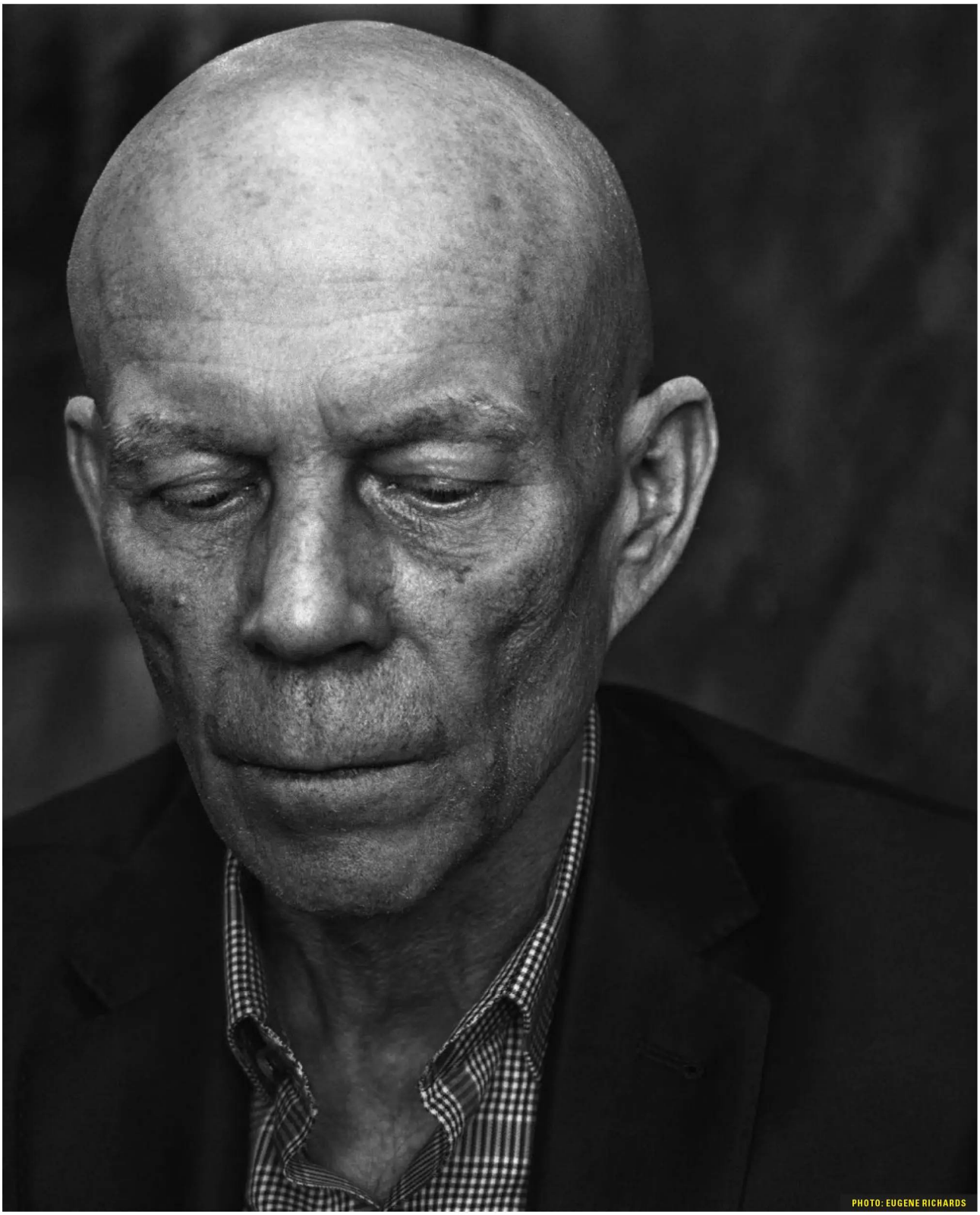


PHOTO: EUGENE RICHARDS

Something of a restless soul, Clarke confesses to having "the patience of a newt". Always with fingers in various pies, he never seems to switch off, flitting from one thing to the next. You imagine his mind is a hive of crazy activity, constantly buzzing with ideas – flip open his head, and you'd probably find a tangle of connected patches, cables and circuits. In Clarke, the electronic force isn't so much strong as completely hard-wired.

As well as Erasure and the new solo material, there's usually a high-profile remix or two on the go, to add to the vast array he's already done for the likes of Sparks, Soft Cell, Nitzer Ebb and many more. His re-rub of Alka's (American producer Bryan Michael) version of Pink Floyd's 'On The Run' is astonishingly good, a real techno banger. It's quite possibly one of his finest remixes to date.

"What Bryan did was replicate that track *exactly*," he says. "And the EMS synthesiser he used, he built himself from scratch. He's a bit of a genius."

In addition to his collaborations with Martyn Ware and Martin Gore, he's worked with electronic luminaries such as Jean-Michel Jarre, Paul Hartnoll (as 2Square), BT and countless others, in various producerly guises. Being so prolific, does he ever reflect on the vast array of music he's composed over the years?

"I can't say I really do," he says. "When we make an Erasure album, I rarely listen to it once we're done because the moment was in the creation. Andy will listen back to old stuff when we're working out what to play on tour. But for me, it's not about 'then' – it's about 'now'."

Clarke's electronic label VeryRecords is still going too, although he says operations were slowed by the pandemic. And he co-hosts an occasional radio programme, 'The Synthesizer Show' – what else? – with his pal Reed Hays. Available to stream online, it's well worth looking up. The pair spin early, experimental, classic and contemporary electronics, have entertaining little chats between songs ("about the weather, synths or whatever takes our mind"), and chuckle together a lot. It's a lovely thing. The playlists, says Clarke, are inspired in part by these very pages.

"I look through your reviews, because there are so many – stuff that I would never have found otherwise," he admits. "It makes up a good 50 per cent of what we play."

But for Clarke, it's not just about music – animation is another important string to his bow. He has a YouTube channel (Vince Clarke Animation) featuring his output to date, in all its quirky glory. Where did the spark for that come from?

"It was one of those things I thought of maybe 10 years ago," he says, instantly warming to the theme. "I was probably on tour, so there's a lot of time to sit around. I was interested in learning computer animation so I started digging into it. I bought a few programs but I couldn't understand them. Then recently, I discovered this much simpler one called Adobe Animate. I started doing online one-to-one classes with an animator in California and just fell in love with it.

"It's really time-consuming, but I like spending time on detail. It's that control freak thing. I'm in control of everything – not only the music but also writing the scripts and what the characters say, controlling how the actors look and how they sound. It's such a satisfying process."

He's literally involved in each element – sketching characters and scenes, finding voice actors on Fiverr and, naturally, composing the sparse electronic backing for each episode. There's a deliciously offbeat and slightly macabre series of very short animations titled 'The Interesting World Of Günter Finn', where the gruff titular character makes rudimentary statements such as, "Today, I would like to yodel for 15 seconds" or "Today, I would like to do my incredibly accurate impersonation of Mr Andrew Bell". It's hilarious. Günter Finn sounds suspiciously like Clarke. Is it him?

"Yeah," he smiles. "It's all just one-line puns. Neil Arthur said to me that there was a skit on 'The Fast Show' ['Jesse's Diets'] where the guy would come out of his shed and go, 'Today, I am going to suck on a maggot' or whatever, and then go back in. I wasn't stealing them but maybe that's where I subconsciously got the idea."

Has Andy Bell seen the one about him?

"It's quite interesting… I think he likes them because they're clever, but other people like them because they're funny. Obviously everybody's sense of humour is different. Some people take it too literally and just don't get it."

His 'Bacon & Eggs' animations, featuring a talking rasher of bacon and his fried egg chum, are wonderfully observed too. The first episode finds our protagonists glued to a shopping channel advertising an "80s synth band starter kit" ("Now you too can croon like Phil Oakey!").

"The joke in that one was that people think synthesisers play themselves – and as it turns out, they kind of do," says Clarke. "You don't need talent to play a synthesiser and make electronic music."

At the time of writing, there are 10 'Günter Finn' and three 'Bacon & Eggs' episodes, with the promise of more to come. He claims to be doing it primarily for his own indulgence, but are there plans to try and showcase his work to a wider audience?

"Obviously, if Netflix offered me a million quid, I might well consider it," he says.

As the interview starts to wind down, I throw a few quickfire questions at him. What would young Vince think of older Vince?

"He'd be amazed that he's still making money out of music."

And as a music industry veteran, does he have any wise nuggets of advice for his younger self?

"What I've learned from Andy is not to take things too seriously," he reveals. "I think I'm better now than I was. And I've since learned a few tricks to cope with whatever stress is going on. First thing is, never read an interview or a review… ever."

Wow. When was the last time you actually read one?

"About 20 years ago. Because it's gone, isn't it? What I've talked about, even the most ridiculous things, I'm sure I'd wish I hadn't said them. But I can't do anything about it – so that's why I won't read this interview."

With our time nearly up, Clarke reveals that he's hoping to perform 'Songs Of Silence' live at some point.

"Not as a concert but more a kind of event, really," he says, enigmatically.

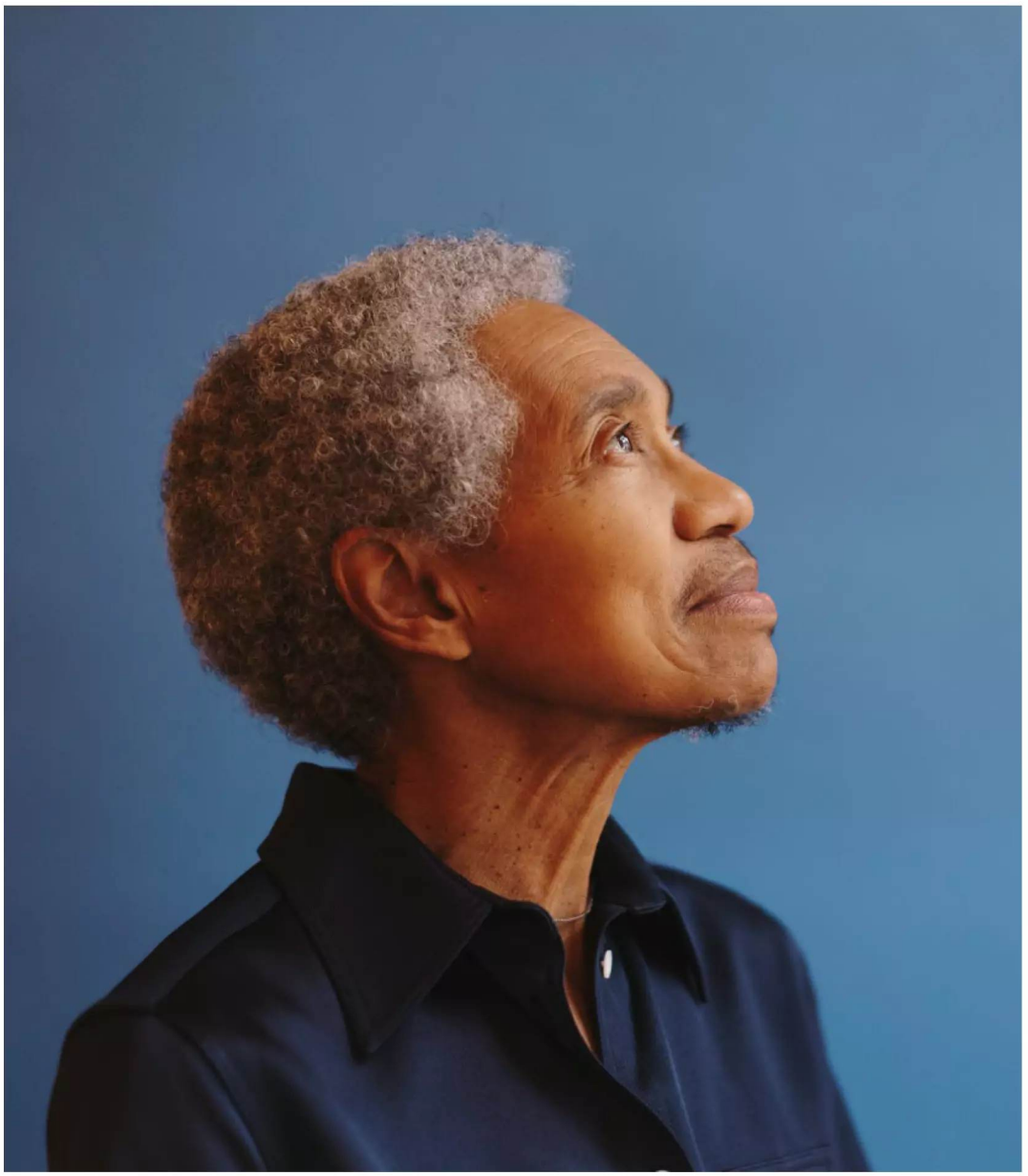
And, with momentum behind him, he's already working on more solo material too.

"I've started writing and recording new stuff. Not in the same vein as 'Songs Of Silence', because I didn't want to make more drone tracks, but things that are a bit more random. I really like generative music – Eno-type stuff. And I've got a lot of Erasure tracks written for Andy to hear. I'm looking forward to hooking up with him again. I have my new set of rules for that particular record – I think it'll make for an interesting album."

He refuses to tell me what those parameters are, but perhaps that's for the best. For now, let's just wallow and revel in the gorgeous "electronic vistas" that make up 'Songs Of Silence'.

Vince Clarke's solo album has been a very long time coming, but it's been more than worth the wait. Having worked completely on his own terms for the first time, and with infinite sonic avenues and nuances still to explore, it feels like the quiet genius is only just getting started.

**'Songs Of Silence' is released by Mute on 17 November**



# ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

On his first studio album since 2004, revered American singer/composer Beverly Glenn-Copeland exudes warmth and optimism. He talks about the inspiration behind the record, his late-career resurgence and the inordinate power of love

**WORDS: JIM BUTLER**
**PICTURES: BRIANNA BLANK**

At the beginning of the summer, the septuagenarian musical polymath Beverly Glenn-Copeland received an honorary doctorate from the University of Toronto. The degree – a Doctor of Laws ("Not something one gets every day," Copeland joked in his acceptance speech) – was given in recognition of his "innovative and influential musicianship known around the world and his sterling artistic reputation".

However well-deserved his late-life flowering may be, though, after four decades of relative obscurity, it only tells part of the story. In a stirring celebratory speech replete with emotional intelligence, Copeland beseeches his fellow graduates, most of them nearly 60 years his junior, to "push for advocacy" in a world that continues to lurch from one crisis to another.

Copeland's beautiful and empathetic act of oratory recounts some of the most significant points of a varied and colourful life. He movingly talks about growing up black and gay in an America still scarred by the hateful bile espoused by the Ku Klux Klan and which continued in parts to be motivated by their racist rhetoric. And while much remained "hidden" (he eventually identified as a trans man in the early 2000s), he admits that music "allowed his essential self a voice" and that today he has a "dogged commitment to be no one other than myself".

Yet, rather than burn with the righteous indignation of someone denied so much for so long, his address to the University of Toronto's class of 2023 is suffused with love and compassion. A few weeks later and Copeland is – for once – lost for words when trying to describe this momentous event.

"Words fail in expressing what this experience was for me," he smiles, gathering himself before finally arriving at an adequate explanation. "My purpose was the same as my purpose in writing 'The Ones Ahead' – to encourage all young people to search for and find their inner gold."

'The Ones Ahead' is not only Copeland's first album of new material since 2004's 'Primal Prayer', but also his first fresh body of work since his 1986 masterpiece 'Keyboard Fantasies' was somehow discovered by a Japanese collector in 2015. The story goes that Copeland pressed 200 copies of his far-sighted magnum opus on cassette, sold 50, and the Japanese collector snaffled the remaining 150 almost 30 years later.

Finally getting a vinyl release in 2016, the preternatural genius at the heart of 'Keyboard Fantasies' – imagine Talk Talk collaborating with Nina Simone – led to Copeland being embraced by a generation of musicians such as Bon Iver, Blood Orange and Julia Holter, who would have all been in short trousers when the piece was originally released.

Given the affection that a coterie of today's musicians has extended towards Copeland and the numerous critical hosannas bestowed upon the Philadelphia-born singer-songwriter, the expectations surrounding 'The Ones Ahead' are unlike anything Copeland has ever faced. Thankfully, this novel sensation didn't faze him, not least because he didn't set out to write an album.

"It's true," he says when asked about what got him back into the studio. "I had a lot of music I was excited about that needed recording. So it was more about gathering songs I had written, some a while back and others more recently, that felt like they belonged together. Once the idea of creating an album became fully formed, I realised I wanted to provide a vehicle for encouraging the generations of young people coming up in these difficult times – an essential offering for affirming their humanity."

The latter part of that explanation, much like Copeland's convocation address, speaks to the essence of 'The Ones Ahead'. He explains that the title refers to the next generations and those in what he calls "the unseen world" – our ancestors, our spiritual guides.

"A huge part of my mission has always been about encouraging young people," he says. "It's a part of my Buddhist practice. Those coming up today and those yet to be born have a challenging path ahead, and it's imperative for me to use what remains of my life to provide tangible encouragement."

The pleasing news is that the sonic boost Copeland hopes to yield is writ large across 'The Ones Ahead'. Though he's not easily given to hyperbole, he describes it as his "best work to date". It's undoubtedly a triumph, rich in mood, nuance and atmosphere, as the nine tracks mine an exuberant vein of warmth and optimism. Musically ambitious, it marries Copeland's folk-blues roots with a soulful generosity reminiscent of Curtis Mayfield, while its ambient, post-rock electronics and sophisticated avant-pop bring to mind the likes of Arthur Russell, Talk Talk (again) and Khruangbin.

Although Copeland himself is too modest to countenance such a suggestion, this vindicatory album gives weight to Kurt Vonnegut's maxim that music is proof of the existence of God. Or at least some higher, spiritual presence.

"Sound waves as the ultimate creative force, yes!" he smiles. "David Bowie talked about art as the new way that spirit can speak to us in times when most cannot find spirit in traditional religion. I concur with David's view."

When he was much younger and struggling to find his way as a musician, Copeland was told by someone of a mystical bent that he wouldn't become successful until later in life. And while he admits that his fragile ego probably wouldn't have borne the weight of recognition in his 20s and 30s ("I would have become lost"), he certainly doesn't believe his late-life creative blooming was somehow inevitable.

Indeed, by the time he reached his 70s (he turns 80 next year), with his music still unknown, Copeland confided to his wife Elizabeth that it wouldn't be until after he died that his work would be discovered, and she would then be set for the rest of her life.

"I was happy with this thought, but my fiery wife wasn't having it," says Copeland. "She said, 'No way. I want you to reap the fruits of your labour'. She began to pray for a way to be shown because at that time few people were interested in my music."

Global fame may have eluded him until recently, but artistically he's led a bountiful life, underpinned by his SGI Buddhist faith. After his first two self-titled folk/blues/jazz albums stalled at the starting line in the early 1970s, it was his Buddhist beliefs that helped him stay buoyant.

"The daily practice keeps me grounded," he explains. "And the community… well, I go to them when I need guidance or when I've lost my way."

Musically, he contributed to children's TV shows, including the iconic 'Sesame Street' and, in Canada, 'Mr Dressup'. Can the joyous optimism that pervades much of his work be traced back to his involvement in the wide-eyed world of children?

"Absolutely," he shoots back instantly. "Working with children is a central must for me. I spent years living in obscurity and doing shows for children whenever and wherever I could."

With his interest piqued by the emergence of home computers in the early 1980s, and driven by a childlike curiosity to tease different sounds from the raft of new technologies flooding onto the market at the time, Copeland composed 'Keyboard Fantasies' – a mesmeric mix of song cycles, half-speed futuristic techno and new-age serenity – and self-released the album. The reception to this astonishing piece of calmness-as-art was not indifference or stunned silence – no one knew it existed.

Undeterred, he persisted with his creative quest. He met his wife Elizabeth in the mid-1990s. Fittingly, their relationship began as artistic collaborators.

"She sang back-up for me in concerts, as well as inviting me to participate in the shows she was producing," he recalls.

The pair began to create arts programmes for local communities – first in Ontario, then in New Brunswick when they moved east. Today, he credits her unswerving support as critical – particularly through lockdown and beyond, when they moved four times in just over three years.

"She is my memory, my caretaker," he says. "She runs our business. I know that without her I might have kicked the bucket or be working in Walmart!"

At the heart of 'The Ones Ahead' is a belief in the power of advocacy. Specifically, a resolute desire to motivate today's young to stand up for their rights. Copeland's own championing is for black, indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ communities.

The opening track on the album is the deeply affecting 'Africa Calling'. It moves joyously through the sound of the African diaspora, touching on soul, funk and carnival rhythms. He explains that the song began as an exploration of a strange time signature before morphing into an unapologetic deep dive into his African heritage.

"Every time I hear it, it brings me to tears as I dance," he smiles. "So much knowledge of our lineage was lost to those of us whose ancestors were brought here when slavery became big business. My African, Cherokee and Scottish heritage all come through in my music."

Rather than explore the pain – both figurative and literal – of the slave trade in lyric form, Copeland invokes a wordless chant throughout. The song's easy Ali-like rhythmic shuffle strengthens the message.

"The wordlessness of – and the interplay with – the rhythms were the only way to sing about a longing which no language can properly describe," he says. "I know that music is a way through, a way to alchemically transform pain. It's medicine, pure and simple."

In observing the persistent effects of colonialism in his music, Copeland cites the influence of the indigenous Canadian-American folk musician Buffy Sainte-Marie. He talks about how her work has inspired a new generation of musicians to embrace their musical roots.

"As they reclaim their heritage musically, other aspects of the beautiful, sophisticated cultures that were wiped out through the violence of colonialism and memories of these cultures begin to shine through, and an element of dignity is restored."

Influence is a two-way street, of course. Copeland's track 'La Vita' has most recently inspired Romy on her summer banger, 'Enjoy Your Life', in which she samples the line, "My mother says to me, 'Enjoy your life'".

"My mother actually said this to me in the last decade of her life," he recalls. "After a time of separation, we had a healing, my mother and I. We were able to be with each other fully in our humanity, and she came to live with me. I saw her through her death, held her in my arms."

The trans actor Elliot Page is another to have paid homage to Copeland, including a selection of Copeland's lyrics in his recently published acclaimed memoir.

"I am deeply touched," says Copeland.

Unsurprisingly, music, art and culture are things worth fighting for in Copeland's sympathetic worldview. He talks about how the powers that be are trying to break the ties – often invisible, in the case of art – that bind us.

"We must all actively work to keep them strong," he says. "This is hard in a dominant culture, particularly in North America, that puts 'art' as a fluffy extra and does not recognise it as an essential. So, more and more artists are struggling to stay afloat and are pushed to meet standards of sameness rather than innovation."

Copeland should know. Since the pandemic, times have been hard – both financially and health-wise. He and Elizabeth have been held aloft by the kindness and benevolence of strangers as they have been forced to move around the Maritime provinces of eastern Canada.

"That powerful community love was very much at the front of my mind when recording the album," he says.

And for Copeland, love is everything. It's pivotal to his musical journey and central to his latest breathtaking, emotional and humbling piece of work.

"Love is a power," he concludes optimistically. "Not a frilly emotion as many would have it. Love exists on many levels – romantic, family, community, love for and with Gaia. I believe the building blocks of the universe are love. I don't talk about God, but name what some would call God as the great mystery, the great mathematician, the great musician… and all woven together with the strands of love."

**'The Ones Ahead' is out now on Transgressive**

# ARK WELDING

AR Kane came up with the term "dreampop" to describe the mind-blowing fusion of musical styles on their late 1980s albums. And as the new 'AR Kive' boxset confirms, their records remain every bit as strange, beautiful and irresistible as they were 35 years ago

**WORDS: PUSH**
**PICTURES: MARK BAKER**

"We didn't take any shit from anybody. As soon as we got a red flag, we walked. Looking back on it now, I think it was because we didn't know what the rules were. We weren't middle-class white kids and we found it difficult to read a lot of the people we met in the music industry. So every time we were told, 'You're going to do this in this way, you're going to do that in that way', we'd be saying to ourselves, 'Yeah? Really? I don't think we fucking are'."

Rudy Tambala is talking about AR Kane, the group that he formed with his boyhood best friend Alex Ayuli in Stratford, east London, in early 1986. Over the next four years, powered by a relentlessly maverick streak and a confidence bordering on arrogance, AR Kane carved out a unique musical path, welding elements of pop, psych, dub, electronica, funk, noise, jazz, ambient and more in a way that had never been done before. Or since.

Even the most cursory listen to 'AR Kive', a reissue boxset on the Rocket Girl label which brings together the band's first two albums, '69' and 'i', proves the point. The 'AR Kive' collection is completed by their 'Up Home!' 12-inch EP, with the three records meticulously remastered by Rudy and sounding as extraordinary as they did when they were originally released on Rough Trade in 1988 and 1989. Their debut album in particular is a work of unbridled brilliance, extolled by the weekly music papers of the day and topping the UK independent charts with sales totalling 60,000 copies.

Alex and Rudy coined the term "dreampop" to describe themselves, but it didn't really do the job. And it wasn't enough that AR Kane didn't sound like anyone else. Half the time, they didn't even sound like AR Kane.

Alex Ayuli and Rudy Tambala met at Park Primary School, an austere Victorian structure overlooking West Ham Park, when they were eight years old. They were both of African descent – Alex's parents were Nigerian, Rudy's father came from Malawi – and they were immediately inseparable, remaining so for the next two decades. The pair have had very limited contact since AR Kane fizzled out in the mid-1990s, though. Rudy says Alex has not been involved in 'AR Kive', for example, but he has given the project his blessing.

An early shared interest for the two young friends was books, especially science fiction, which Rudy first got hooked on after borrowing Robert A Heinlein's 'Citizen Of The Galaxy' and John Wyndham's 'The Chrysalids' from his elder brother. As they edged towards their teens, the boys bonded over music as well, swapping records, compiling tapes for each other, and messing around on a mate's guitar. It was only many years later, after they had seen the Cocteau Twins on 'The Tube', that they decided to have a go at making music themselves.

The first thing they did was choose a name. Dead Can Dance's 'Garden Of The Arcane Delights' EP and Orson Welles' 'Citizen Kane' movie were two inspirations, with the "A" and "R" of "Arkane" split out and representing the initials of their first names. They liked the idea of everybody thinking AR Kane was a person rather than a band.

The same night they settled on a name, they went to a party, where Rudy got chatting to a guy over a spliff and told him he was in a band. He said they were "a bit Velvet Underground, a bit Miles Davies, a bit Joni Mitchell and a bit Cocteau Twins", four artists he had been listening to that day. Rudy's weed buddy turned out to be Ray Shulman, a member of prog rockers Gentle Giant in the 1970s and by then a burgeoning record producer, who asked if he could hear a demo. Not that AR Kane had a demo. They didn't have any songs. They didn't even have any instruments.

"So we went out and bought two guitars and some effects and a little drum machine… and started making a demo," says Rudy. "We had no idea what we were doing. We did everything on two cassette recorders. We would tape a guitar and some beats on one machine, then put that through a speaker while playing the other guitar and doing some vocals, and record everything onto the other machine. We did seven songs like that."

However primitive AR Kane's earliest recordings might have been, Ray Shulman was impressed. He took their demo to Derek Birkett, bassist with anarcho-punk outfit Flux Of Pink Indians, who had recently set up his One Little Indian imprint.

"Derek wanted to see us play live, so we booked this rehearsal room and put together a band," says Rudy. "They were just people we knew, like an old school friend who had a bass guitar he couldn't really play and my sister Maggie helping out on vocals. We were all black apart from Dan Goodwin, the drummer, who was later in Kitchens Of Distinction. Derek turned up with all these punk types and it was obvious they weren't expecting us to look like we did. We weren't good enough to do any of our songs live, so we basically did a set of noise."

The story goes that Derek Birkett said, "You sound shit, let's do a single", and the result was 'When You're Sad', a 12-inch produced by Ray and issued in the summer of 1986. Piled high with fuzz and feedback, the record prompted comparisons with The Jesus And Mary Chain and sold pretty well, but Derek dragged his heels about putting the band back into the studio. And while he dithered, Ivo Watts-Russell swooped in and grabbed AR Kane for 4AD.

"Derek really wasn't happy about that, so he took his crew down to 4AD and started hassling them," remembers Rudy. "It was just so bizarre, you know, Derek's anarcho-punks offering out Ivo's pale and skinny 4AD guys. We thought it was hilarious."

AR Kane's first 4AD release was another 12-inch, 'Lollita', this time with Cocteau Twin Robin Guthrie at the controls. Their second saw them teaming up with Colourbox under the name M/A/R/R/S – Alex and Rudy were the "A" and the first "R" – for the sampling masterpiece 'Pump Up The Volume' and its equally magnificent flip, the distorted epic 'Anitina'. But the phenomenal success of the M/A/R/R/S record, a Number One in the UK and a Top 10 in 17 other countries, altered the relationship AR Kane had with their new label. But not in a good way.

"We loved being on 4AD, we loved having Robin Guthrie produce us, but the contract that they offered us was a really bad story," says Rudy. "They thought we'd roll over just because of who they were, but we weren't having it. I rang Ivo up from a telephone box at Maryland Point in Stratford and he said, 'Rudy, either you sign this deal or you're off the label'. The last thing I said to him was 'Fuck off' as I put the phone down."

He pauses and chuckles.

"God, I'm coming across as a right narky git, aren't I?"

In June 1988, a few months after the 'Up Home' EP had picked up where M/A/R/R/S' 'Anitina' left off, AR Kane delivered the hazy, trippy, exquisitely otherworldly '69'. They'd signed to Rough Trade soon after leaving 4AD, using the advance Geoff Travis had given them to build a small studio in the basement of Alex's mum's house. With Alex determined to keep his full-time job as an advertising copywriter, they recorded the album in the evenings and at weekends. Ray Shulman, who was by now also working with The Sugarcubes, was a frequent visitor, playing bass on several tracks as well as helping out on the production.

From the colossal dub of 'Baby Milk Snatcher' and the feedback-soaked 'Sulliday' to the queasy ambient jazz that is 'Dizzy' and the slo-mo psych of 'Spermwhale Trip Over', the album was an instant hit with the UK music papers. Melody Maker journalist Simon Reynolds called it "the outstanding record of 1988".

"We didn't make '69' for anybody but ourselves," declares Rudy. "It was like we had a new toy, this thing called making music, and everything we did stemmed from our desire to get those sounds out."

Which is perhaps why the press went into spasms trying to convey what the album was like and what made it so special.

"We did often wonder what some of the journalists were on," grins Rudy. "But at the same time, we totally loved it. And I have to admit that a lot of what they wrote complemented what we were doing, because there weren't any words to describe some of the sounds we were making. We didn't realise that to begin with, but we caught on quickly."

There are numerous references to dreams and sex in the often oblique lyrics of '69', two everyday human experiences that involve or induce altered states of consciousness. The sea, that mercurial, immersive and transportive environment that makes up more than 70 per cent of our planet, is another repeated theme.

"We were lumped in with ethereal 4AD artists, but also with groups like Sonic Youth, even though we didn't look or sound like any of them," says Rudy. "That's where the idea of 'dreampop' came from. We felt we needed our own way of describing the music and that made sense to us, partly because we were into the idea of lucid dreaming. We'd talked about our dreams for years and tried different techniques to trigger lucid dreaming. After we formed the band, we started dreaming music more and more. A lot of our melodies came out of dreams. We'd wake up and go, 'Quick, get it onto a cassette'.

"We weren't averse to chemicals too, although we didn't sing about that much, apart from 'Spermwhale Trip Over'. I took LSD experimentally. I'd taken it at a few parties, but I soon realised that wasn't a good idea. But taking it at home and spending the day listening to my favourite music, doing some yoga, going for a walk in the woods… that was more of the British trip. Alex and I were both into that, we were into acid and yoga and meditation, and I was also into Zen Buddhism. So we knew how you could sit still for half an hour and completely leave your body.

"But while we knew about altered states of consciousness, we knew about the bad side of that as well, which is why '69' has a dark edge to it. 'Dizzy', for instance, is about having that astral projection experience but not being able to get back into your body again. Then you would feel quite dissociated for a few weeks, like a bad trip kind of thing. We didn't talk about that sort of stuff explicitly, though, we just tried to express the feeling. So if you think about it from that perspective, we could never have sounded like anybody else. What we were doing was something extremely personal."

And then there was 'i', AR Kane's second album, which came out in October 1989. With 26 tracks spread across two discs, it both delighted and confounded the critics once more, not least because of its many and varied pop moments. The effortlessly funky 'A Love From Outer Space' and the strings and horns-fuelled electro of 'Snow Joke', for instance.

"After the success of '69', Geoff Travis basically said, 'We're chucking the kitchen sink at this, so you can do whatever you like now'. It was like we'd been handed the keys to the candy store. We thought, 'OK, let's have great studios, top engineers, cool producers…'. There were suddenly no rules. And that was something we were always going to respond well to."

BIC
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The album was recorded at some of London's leading studios, including Blackwing, Orinoco and The Church, places that were worlds away from Alex's mum's basement. Bonjo Iyabinghi Noah from African Head Charge and Billy McGee from Marc And The Mambas were among the guests, the latter bringing along other members of Marc Almond's entourage, including cellist Audrey Riley and violinist Gini Ball. Ray Shulman, who sadly died earlier this year, played a key role on 'i' too.

"We had a good time and we probably got a bit self-indulgent," says Rudy. "I remember we were reading a lot – books on esoteric religions, some sci-fi stuff, the newspapers – and the ideas were flowing constantly. I'd be saying, 'Let's try this', and Alex would come back with, 'Let's try that'. And because we had plenty of freedom, we took it as far as we could. Which was exactly the right thing to do.

"When we'd finished, we sat back and thought, 'What have we got here?'. I'd been reading about how humans basically consist of four components. It was to do with four different brains – a moving brain, an instinctive brain, an intellectual brain and an emotional brain – and each song seemed to fit in with one of those components. So when we arranged the tracks over the four sides of the album, it felt like we'd created a whole person. That's why we called it 'i'."

Typically of AR Kane, they claimed there was also a fifth side to 'i', which was dispersed within Side Four.

"We were just playing with the form, you know, this idea of a five-sided four-sided album," says Rudy. "Listening to it again, it's a really strong record. It's maybe not as good as '69', not as a complete album, but there aren't any duds on there."

And if '69' and 'i' are radically different beasts, AR Kane were something else again when they played live. They didn't actually perform many shows – the Setlist website documents just 11 gigs between 1986 and 1989 – but they were untamed and unhinged spectacles, with Alex and Rudy roaming every inch of the stage, their bodies twisted and their eyes wild as they wrestled primeval noises from their guitars. Rudy in particular was a ferocious figure up there. So it seems strange that the pair have been widely cited as a major inspiration for the shoegaze scene.

"I don't think we ever stood still and stared at our feet," grins Rudy. "We both did loads of clubbing when we were younger – going out all night and building up a sweat on the dancefloor and losing ourselves in music – and that had a massive impact on us. We'd take a handful of blues, have some spliff, have a couple of rum and cokes, and spend hours just dancing. Even more so after ecstasy came along.

"So when it came to playing live, yeah, we put that into it. There was the rumbling bass and the big waves of feedback and the blood spurting from our fingers as we hit the guitars… that was all part of it for us. It was physical. It was visceral. It was violent. It was a real expression of some very intense feelings. We certainly weren't fey."

The third and final AR Kane album, the largely downtempo and melancholic 'New Clear Child', came out on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label in 1994. Alex had moved over to America by this point and Rudy says the tracks were put together by "sending cassettes backwards and forwards across the sea". It wasn't a happy experience for either of them. A fourth album was discussed, but the plans were shelved before the recording began.

While Alex Ayuli left the music industry after a couple of solo releases at the turn of the millennium, Rudy Tambala has remained active throughout the last three decades, teaming up with his sister Maggie as Sufi in the 1990s and as Jübl in more recent times. He's also been an attentive steward of the AR Kane legacy, overseeing compilations and reissues, managing websites and social media accounts, and even resurrecting the name for several live shows with Maggie and guitarist Andy Taylor in the mid-2010s. Jübl developed out of these gigs.

That Rudy still has a lot of love for AR Kane is obvious from his work on the 'AR Kive' boxset. Alongside the chunky slices of vinyl, the package includes a superb booklet containing photos, a mini-biography of the band by UK music journalist Neil Kulkarni, and a short story from Rudy. There's also an essay by the late Greg Tate, the New York writer and activist who co-founded the Black Rock Coalition with Living Colour guitarist Vernon Reid. Tate describes AR Kane as "two dope boyz… who claimed all the hallmarks of Black Alienation, Black Rage, Black Silence, Black Noise and Black Ragga as their sonorous and luminous own".

"I wanted to include that because we have never told the black side of our story before," explains Rudy. "At the time, Alex and I always tried to steer clear of the whole question of identity. Any identity. As a matter of fact, Greg and Vernon wrote to us in the late 1980s and said, 'We want you to join the Black Rock Coalition and lead the movement in Europe', but we turned them down. We weren't interested. It didn't make any sense to us. We didn't see our music as black. We saw it as music of many colours.

"I guess a lot of it was about us wanting to go against the grain. I mean, we got a negative response from some black people, even getting abused on the street for wearing leather jackets, because that's not how we were supposed to have dressed. With the benefit of hindsight, though, I've come to embrace the idea that we were part of a lineage of creative black artists. And I know we couldn't possibly have done what we did if we hadn't been part of that lineage. I also know I'd be naive to ignore the fact that being black in Britain in the 1980s was definitely a thing… but what AR Kane did was definitely a different kind of thing."

A different kind of thing in every way and on every level. Unorthodox to the core and glorious to the max.

**'AR Kive' is out now on Rocket Girl**

# THE FAIRY HIKERS

For his latest release as Belbury Poly, Jim Jupp has assembled a Ghost Box supergroup with a mid-Atlantic feel. Gathered together for the first time, they discuss 'The Twilight Zone', flat-roofed pubs and the fairy folklore that inspired the new record

**WORDS: BOB FISCHER**
**PICTURES: ANDI SAPEY**

"The first track on this album picks up from the final track on a previous Belbury Poly release," explains Jim Jupp. "They both use a field recording from a wood near my house, by a main road. To me, it's a very familiar sound – birdsong with early morning traffic. So we're continuing the fairy folklore themes of that last album, of people being pixie-led and going missing in nature, but this time in a more modern setting."

It's a baking hot Sunday lunchtime and the whole Belbury Poly gang is here. It's the first time they've all met in person. And what a curious assortment of people they are – two eccentric Brits enjoying an afternoon of entente cordiale with two equally offbeat Americans. Jim is, of course, co-founder of the Ghost Box label, the politely genial rector of a distinctly unusual parish. He's accompanied by ever-relaxed bassist Chris Budd, a gin-sipping London lounge lizard in neckerchief and vintage shades.

Also here are fast-talking US beat poet Justin Hopper – resplendent in pork pie hat, tipped at a jaunty angle – and an actual rock star in the shape of Texas-based flautist Jesse Chandler, immaculately frazzled on the final weekend of a month-long European tour with Midlake. Assembled around a pub table in West London, they look like the house band from some strange, long-forgotten Hanna-Barbera cartoon.

Belbury Poly's new record is called 'The Path'. As Jim says, it's a sequel to the band's 2020 opus, 'The Gone Away'. Both albums are about fairies – more specifically, the time-honoured fairy predilection for luring unsuspecting travellers off the beaten track to their doom. Even in contemporary cityscapes.

"It reminds me of a conversation I had with my mum about my grandad," says Chris. "He was once pixie-led in the middle of Hammersmith. You think of it happening in a field, but he was coming out of a cinema in West London, where he grew up. And suddenly, immediately, he just didn't know where he was. He found his way home eventually, but when Jim started talking about people being pixie-led, grandad's story made sense. I don't think I've ever been pixie-led myself, but maybe it'll happen today, on my way home…"

The group approach is important here. 'The Gone Away' was an album of Jim's solo electronica, recorded as a deliberate throwback to Ghost Box's DIY origins. 'The Path' is an expansive musical ensemble piece, a funk and jazz-fuelled odyssey with a transatlantic feel reinforced by Justin's mellifluous narration. Is this school of oddness something that resonates equally with Belbury Poly's new Stateside recruits?

Jesse Chandler grew up in Upstate New York, at the foot of the Catskills.

"There's definitely a spookiness about the Catskills," he declares. "It's a very old mountain range, with a lot of lore and ghost stories. My friend and I, growing up in Woodstock in the 1980s, used to go exploring. There was a loop of three or four miles with houses all along it, including ours, but within that loop was a giant forest. So we'd run into hobos, and we once found a pile of heavy metal magazines in there, left in a backpack. Our challenge was to get lost on purpose then somehow find our way home."

So in the context of 'The Path', I wonder, is being "pixie-led" a metaphor for the giddying pace of change in our modern towns and cities? After all, we don't need the malevolent influence of fairy beings to make us lose our bearings in familiar surroundings. I keep getting lost on the sprawling new housing estate five minutes from my front door.

Jim nods.

"It happens in London all the time," he says. "The rate of change is just incredible. I lived here for 10 years, and when I come back now – even to the centre – it looks completely different. The roads go in different directions."

"That's why we tied together those folkloric elements with that claustrophobic Soho jazz vibe," adds Justin.

"And it wasn't intentional," insists Jim. "But it made perfect sense for this to be, broadly, an Anglo-American project. It took the music in a direction I wouldn't otherwise have taken. These two cultures know each other intimately, but even today we often don't know what the hell each other is talking about."

"It's a special relationship," smiles Justin.

My interest duly piqued, I want to dig further into that relationship – the complicated cross-pollination of "two countries separated by the same language", as George Bernard Shaw once put it.

The genesis of 'The Path' arose from long walks across the Sussex Downs, with Jim and the now Essex-based Justin exploring a plethora of narrative ideas. Including, at one stage, a struggling US writer ("Sound familiar?" quips Justin) being driven to mental breakdown by the sheer strangeness of the British landscape.

"One of the very first things Jim and I discussed was the idea of the circular walk," says Justin. "Always starting and ending in a pub! That's such a British thing. It made me wonder what would happen if someone like Jack Kerouac was doing 'On The Road' – but on a circular walk? That whole sense of freedom and beatnik jazz, forever going forward, forward, forward… it would just turn into this kind of degenerative destructiveness."

"Our other idea was what I think Justin called a 'taxonomy' of weird landscape features," adds Jim. "Things that seem quite normal to British people. Flat-roofed pubs. Footpaths that just stop. Roundabouts. Motorway signs to 'The North'! We take all these things for granted, but they're actually really odd. So we imagined this American guy wandering around the British landscape thinking, 'What the hell *is* all this?'."

The music of 'The Path' reflects these dichotomies. It's American jazz and funk, but filtered through the prism of vintage British film soundtracks and library recordings. The title track in particular feels like a thrilling, distant cousin of Roy Budd's score to 'Get Carter'. Jim also cites the influence of eminent British jazzer Michael Garrick, in particular his 1968 recording, 'Prelude To Heart Is A Lotus'. Jesse, listening intently, admits he's been fascinated by the contrasts between the two schools.

"I grew up listening to and emulating American jazz," he says. "But in the last decade or so I've heard some of the more obscure British artists. There's a sense of freedom among the Americans, an effortlessness in how they play. Here, it's maybe a little more constructed, more thought-out. It's no less musical, but it's coming from a different angle."

That's probably because all British people are deeply repressed, I suggest.

"Should we perhaps say 'mannered'?" protests Chris. "But yes, the music is often very spare. It's jazz at its fighting weight. That cinematic element is important too. This was functional music doing a job, and I responded to that."

It's weird though, isn't it? In the US, jazz is seen as the ultimate in musical expression. In Britain, we grew up hearing it as the background music for the test card on BBC Two. I remind Jim that, the last time we spoke, he cited the jaunty theme from 'One Man And His Dog' as an important formative influence on the early sound of Belbury Poly.

"TV themes are never far away from any Ghost Box album," he admits. "I know we talk about this all the time, but there's something really evocative about them."

"Well, they're repetitive, aren't they?" ponders Chris. "You might hear a film score once or twice, but how many episodes of 'Man About The House' were there? TV themes lodge in your head through familiarity."

"I think it might be necessary for someone to explain to Jesse what 'One Man And His Dog' is," interjects Justin.

"OK…" says Jim, taking a deep breath. "In this country, farmers train border collies to herd sheep using all kinds of whistles and hand signals, and it's done at the level of a competitive sport. So every week – on primetime TV, on one of our three channels – we'd watch organised sheep-herding. 'Come by'! At the end of the show, the sheep ended up in a little square pen, and you'd hear a ripple of applause from across the fields. But it also had this laid-back, jazzy synth music as its theme."

"Did this compete on television with snooker?" asks an incredulous Jesse.

It competed on television with *everything*. It ran for nearly 40 years.

"Netflix has got it now," deadpans Chris.

We're being lured off the conversational trail here. There's also a danger of being sidetracked by Jesse's new-found love of mushy peas ("I'm a fan of peas in general, but those… wow") and Chris' appreciation of vintage 'Sesame Street' animations.

Instead, let's talk about Justin's honey-voiced narration of 'The Path'. Ultimately only loosely tethered to that initial narrative of a landscape-inspired breakdown, it nevertheless follows a grand tradition of American beat poetry edging curiously close to the mainstream. Alongside solemn warnings about straying into fairy realms ("One step into the stray sod and you're committed to the cause"), there are soliloquies about the lingering potency of childhood flying dreams and the mystical properties of moths.

"It's entirely serious," says Justin. "Except it's also a tiny bit tongue-in-cheek. Does that make sense? It's dramatic and beatniky and everything, and that's sort of funny. But it's also 100 per cent for real."

He stresses the influence of Ken Nordine, the great mid-20th century voiceover man, whose surreal 1967 spoken-word album 'Colors' had its origins in a series of jazz-influenced paint commercials.

"Because of my background, I have a real love for what I think of as middle-class, middle-20th century, Middle America," explains Justin. "My grandparents were from the Mid-West, basically dirt farmers who became middle class, and for them everything was middle-of-the-road. But Ken Nordine made a really psychedelic version of that. A version that's fucked up."

"There's something of Rod Serling's introductions to 'The Twilight Zone' about your narration as well," adds Jim.

"Rod Serling was my single biggest influence on this album," nods Justin. "I went to the same high school as he did. 'The Twilight Zone' has lots of stories about very ordinary people descending into madness, having bizarre things happen to them. Things they can't explain to anyone else. And, knowingly and unknowingly, a lot of what happens on this album was about capturing that kind of feeling."

Musically, the album has clearly been a hugely collaborative exercise.

"I made some fairly simplistic demos," explains Jim. "I knew at least half the tracks would have a backbone of drums and bass guitar. I actually based a couple of demos on the kind of breakbeat samples DJs were using in the 1990s, then passed them around for everyone to lay down their own arrangements."

"Should we talk about the colour-coded spreadsheet?" asks Jesse. "This is the most efficiently recorded album I've ever been part of."

"That's because I'm so uptight!" laughs Jim. "It was just a list of tracks, with the sessions that needed doing and who was going to do them."

He's keen to praise the contribution of session drummer Max Saidi, perhaps the only Ghost Box recruit to have previously worked with both Peter Andre and Will Young, and who came on Chris' personal recommendation. The enduring relationship between Jim and Chris seems pivotal to the cohesive feel of 'The Path'.

"Jim and I have been friends for decades," says Chris. "Our wives went to university together, and now we're a gang. I'm always keen to get involved with Ghost Box, even though Jim's actually quite a good bass player and he doesn't really need me. I remember turning up at his studio one day and he said, 'Look, I've bought a bass!'. And I thought, 'Oh, fuck…'."

For Justin too, the cooperative nature of the work was clearly a very rewarding experience.

"The tracks with my words were composed in tandem, back and forth and back and forth, in a way that was really special," he says. "It was much more of a collaborative project than most things of this ilk. If you listen to older poetry records, it's just someone playing music and someone else reading poetry, but that's very much not what happened here."

Even as we speak, creativity is fizzing around the table. Jesse reveals that his next Ghost Box album, recorded under his regular nom de plume, Pneumatic Tubes, will be based around the pseudo-spiritual aspects of the 1980s jogging craze.

At the same time, he divulges, he's partnering with Justin on a theatrical performance inspired by the legacy of *actual* pneumatic tubes – the hydraulic mailing system pioneered in department stores in the late 19th century. Jim is clearly proud of the gloriously offbeat projects being moulded together by his label's disparate alumni.

"Since this thing started coming together, it's been nice to think about Ghost Box having a 'stable'," he says. "There's something really cool about that. Like the Wrecking Crew…"

"Yeah," agrees Justin. "But it's the Wrecking Crew if everyone in the Wrecking Crew lived in the middle of nowhere and shunned the outside world."

It's time to go. The company breaks up and we begin to forge our separate paths into the twisting alleyways of West London. Jesse, on his last afternoon in the UK, is off to do a soundcheck for a solo show in a nearby basement venue. Justin and Jim go in search of the latter's mysteriously elusive Premier Inn.

And Chris? Who knows. Perhaps he finally fulfils that long-standing ambition to be pixie-led around the streets of Hammersmith. If he *has* vanished for good, let this be his epitaph… extensive research reveals there were actually 39 episodes of 'Man About The House'.

**'The Path' is out now on Ghost Box**

# UNEARTHLY REALMS

Exploring woozy, hauntological music and transmissions from a "half-remembered" parallel dimension, the esoteric Ghost Box imprint is defined by Julian House's gloriously surreal artwork and visuals. With an ongoing campaign of back-catalogue reissues, the acclaimed graphic designer dives into his dazzling portfolio

**INTERVIEW: VELIMIR ILIC**

JULIAN HOUSE

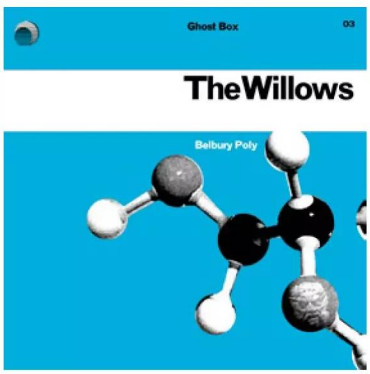
Formed in 2004 by producer Jim Jupp and graphic designer Julian House, the truly eclectic Ghost Box label is a difficult one to pigeonhole. Operating in a bewildering realm of "TV soundtracks, folk song, vintage electronics, psychedelia, ghostly pop, supernatural stories and folklore", and informed by library music, kosmische and musique concrète, Jupp has described Ghost Box releases as being made by "like-minded artists, creating music that sounds like it came from an imaginary past".

The label's roster includes Jupp's own Belbury Poly (Belbury being the parallel domain setting for the label) and House's The Focus Group projects, plus Pye Corner Audio, The Advisory Circle, John Foxx and Broadcast. Quite the sonic cocktail.

Rooted for the most part in a quintessentially English "otherness", the Ghost Box oeuvre is steeped in a faded nostalgia that's both uneasy and alluring, embracing the spirit of old public information films and those strange, wonky theme tunes from 1970s schools programmes.

That essential strangeness also feeds into the label's stunning retro-futuristic artwork, designed and overseen by Julian House. Influenced by the work of Peter Saville, Lewis Carroll, Saul Bass and "the pulp end of things", House has created cover art for Stereolab, The Chemical Brothers and The Prodigy, and has been art director on videos for the likes of Radiohead and Pet Shop Boys, among others.

Over the next few pages, House himself talks us through his beguilingly edgy mixed-media oeuvre…




The Focus Group ‘Sketches And Spells’
2005

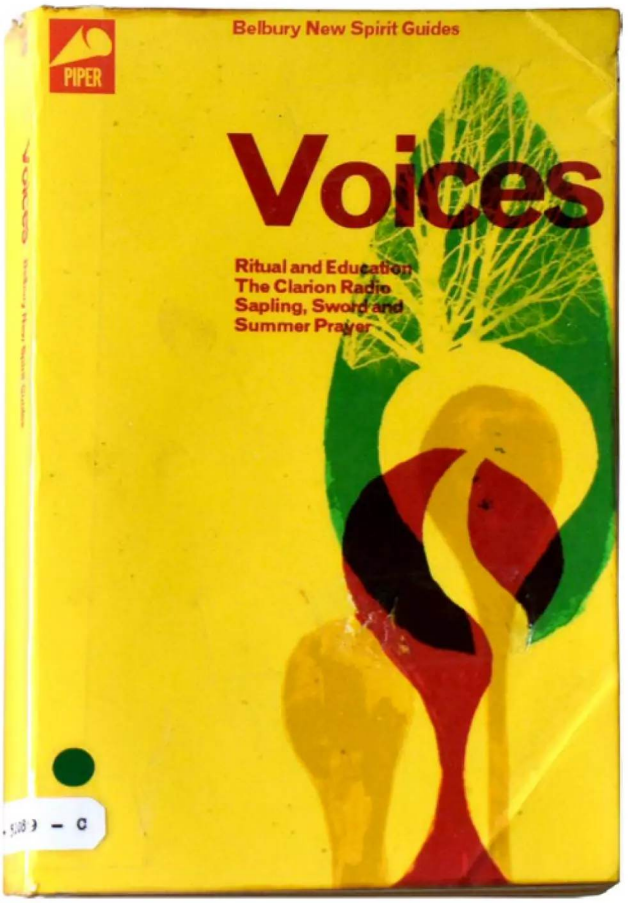
Belbury Poly ‘The Willows’
2005

“Even before we’d finalised any music, I was putting together mood boards and references that Jim and I would pore over. From my day job, creating album campaigns for bands, I had a sense that you’re never just doing a record cover – there’s a whole lot of other material that creates a world around the release. We knew we wanted to build that for Ghost Box, rather than just release a record.

“We started out creating music together, but it soon became apparent that our different approaches would suit two distinct ‘groups’. It made perfect sense that we would start the label with two releases, so when people came to it, they’d feel like they’d stumbled onto a label that had been there for a while.

“A few things helped to create the image and illusion of this Ghost Box world. A Penguin paperback-style grid – which hadn’t been copied to over-saturation at that point – made the records feel like part of a series. It also established a graphic look that nodded to our references and shared obsessions – a fusion of weird horror paperbacks and pedagogical early 1970s education, strange TV and half-remembered textbooks.

“The sleeves included footnotes and references – some real, some made-up – which sketched out the perimeters of our Ghost Box and Belbury world. The choice of back cover imagery and track titles fed into that too. There was a sense that something was being alluded to that wasn’t just the music.”




'New Spirit Happening' exhibition
2009

"In 2009, I DJed at the Le Weekend festival in Stirling, and I was also asked to put together a solo show at the Changing Room contemporary gallery. By this time, the aesthetic and look of Ghost Box was well-established and we'd built quite a lot of background story around the town of Belbury. A few obsessions came together in creating the concept of the show – modernist churches, strange late 1960s cults and the early 1970s boom in paranormal magazines.

"The idea of 'New Spirit Happening' was of an event at the Belbury New Spirit church that wasn't altogether Christian – a summoning or the opening of a portal, perhaps… something hinted. I think it was inspired by the cult rituals of 'Quatermass', the TV series in the late 70s. Around this idea, I created news clippings, photographs, flyers, posters, strange library books and other ephemera. Animated idents and title sequences were playing on old TVs, occasionally interrupted by fleeting glimpses of what could have been amateur footage of ghost or UFO sightings.

"It was, in effect, a multimedia show – a physical revelation of a lot of things we'd alluded to in our footnotes, track titles and graphics."

The Focus Group 'Elektrik Karousel'
2013

The Advisory Circle 'From Out Here'
2014

"The A3 posters we produce are often a way of reinforcing the ideas that we put in. When we start a project, Jim and I will throw around ideas, concepts and reference images. I'll take elements from disparate sources and starting points, and the visual language of the record will start to come together.

"For 'Elektrik Karousel', I was looking at International Times and the English underground press of the late 1960s. The record is a sort of weird kids' TV version of toytown psych,in a way. We thought of having a pop art board game as a way of presenting the track listing and inside graphics. On the poster, we visualised the actual board together with playing counter characters to cut out.

"The inspirations for the 'From Out Here' cover included 1970s computer magazines, music education textbooks and images of strange, school-dance rituals.

"The A3 format lent itself to making it more like a Texas Instruments magazine advert, although the look is juxtaposed with Jim's strange notes – part numbers station readout, part garbled paranormal recording."

Plone 'Puzzlewood'
2020

"The references we start with on a campaign often come from different sources and sometimes don't seem to outwardly fit the Ghost Box world.

"For the 'Puzzlewood' album, I was looking at the 1960s and 70s posters of Tadanori Yokoo and Keiichi Tanaami, and the work of Milton Glaser and Push Pin Studios. Alongside this, we were considering some of Eduardo Paolozzi's Moonstrips Empire News images – as an influence, they pull the more international pop references back into post-war Britain. We were also drawing on the bright, colourful packaging graphics in Jonny Trunk's book 'Wrappers Delight'. Nothing usually gets jettisoned… you can find a place for it somewhere else.

"I often work on several different approaches in parallel which complement and play off each other. In this case, the misregistered print and bubble gum-wrapper style of the back cover brings an element of a half-remembered 1970s childhood. This juxtaposition with the pop art influences somehow lends the cover image a more wistful air."

**The Focus Group's 'Hey Let Loose Your Love' and The Advisory Circle's 'Mind How You Go' will be reissued on Ghost Box in November 2023 and January 2024 respectively**

# PLAYING IT KOOL

As the future-facing Das Koolies, Super Furry Animals' Huw Bunford, Cian Ciarán, Dafydd Ieuan and Guto Pryce explore a range of new sounds, concepts and artistic possibilities. Set the controls for a genre-bending vortex of electronic experimentalism

**WORDS: BEN GILBERT**

To remake/remodel one of British music's most beguiling and beloved pop bands, first synthesise these following icons – Kraftwerk, Giorgio Moroder, Hardfloor, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Vincent Price. Numerous other inputs were also involved in the creation of Das Koolies, a four-piece activated from the circuitry of Super Furry Animals. A "scary goat" and a Welsh creative force called Rhys also feature in a story already promising to stand shoulder to shoulder with what came before.

The adventurous possibilities of this new collective have been tapping away at the psyches of Huw Bunford, Cian Ciarán, Dafydd Ieuan and Guto Pryce for some time. SFA's 2015/16 reunion shows – which came off the back of a five-year break – remain perhaps the most logical date on this timeline.

But the origins of the group and the output collected on their forthcoming debut album, 'DK.01', hark back to a far earlier era – one that saw them working as a predominantly electronic act.

"We were forced – if that's the right word – into a situation where the Furries were on hiatus again, and we wanted to carry on working together," says Ieuan, explaining Das Koolies' formation. "We sat down one day soon after the last tour and said, 'What the fuck are we going to do now?'. We knew we wanted to do something."

It started with a series of weekly "poker nights" which uncovered around 40 pieces of music, some stretching back to cassette recordings from the late 1990s and "in different states of completion".

"It was a mishmash of ideas we didn't see through from SFA rehearsals or album sessions," says Ciarán.

"Gruff's songs usually got in the fucking way!" jokes Ieuan.

"Or they might have been like black sheep that didn't fit in with anything," clarifies Ciarán.

Having navigated the pandemic, they picked up the pace in 2022, and this led to recording sessions at Strangetown Studios in Cardiff Bay, where 'DK.01' was mastered that November.

"This is a body of work that spans a long period in terms of influences, and it varies a lot, given how much you can absorb," says Ciarán.

The time frame also impacted on the creation of the songs that feature on an expansive, extended 82-minute double album – which, at one point, looked set to fill three pieces of vinyl.

"We're executing them in a different way than we would have done 10 years ago," continues Ciarán. "You could argue that the nucleus of these ideas was written by 20-somethings but produced by our contemporary selves."

Pursuing this somewhat flimsy, time-warp conceptualisation of events, he suggests that the emergence of Das Koolies actually returns the quartet to their "comfort zone", referring to this latest phase in their musical iteration as a "reboot".

"We started as an outfit with two cases of electronic kit," he explains. "No acoustic instruments. The first Furries gig was in Bangor, with no guitars and no microphones."

Indeed, within the unfamiliarity that will inevitably exist when a band like Super Furry Animals return minus their most recognisable member – lead singer and guitarist Gruff Rhys is not involved – Das Koolies have pulled off a neat sorcery trick with 'DK.01'.

They've created something that goes consistently further out than the work of their previous incarnation, while still retaining many of the core components that made them such an influential and acclaimed band in the first place.

Anyone who saw SFA live will recognise the techno-inspired, muscle-stretching and eye-popping freak-outs that typically ended concerts in a technicolour blast of sound and vision, led by a singer in an oversized 'Power Rangers' helmet.

These elongated passages form the foundations of Das Koolies' debut album. This is also where Arnold Schwarzenegger becomes involved – an extract of dialogue from the original 'Total Recall' acts as the inspiration for the opening track, 'Best Mindfuck Yet'.

"We used that sample at the end of the show after playing 'Gwreiddiau Dwfn' during the 'Mwng' tour of the USA around 2005," says Bunford. "Because we weren't playing 'The Man Don't Give A Fuck', we wanted a different ending. And that became the climax."

So how do you go about clearing the voice of one of Hollywood's most famous stars?

"You don't – you get an impersonator," says Bunford of the sample, which has been digitally recreated.

The marginally less famous actor Rhys Ifans – who was SFA frontman around the time of their 1993 formation and vocalist on their debut track, 'Of No Fixed Identity' – also appears on 'Best Mindfuck Yet', in a bleak closing sermon recorded on an iPhone via his home in Majorca. Like George Orwell barking TS Eliot's 'The Waste Land' into Cardigan Bay, it sets the often unnerving tone of 'DK.01'.

"I started singing about an experience I had encountering a scary goat on a cliff face near this remote beach in Nant Gwrtheyrn in North Wales," says Bunford, explaining how the track evolved. "It was a bit too theatrical, and we wanted to get the story across in a different way. I wrote a monologue for Rhys, and he kept the first two and the last two lines and filled in the blanks."

Ieuan highlights how such Vincent Price/'Thriller'-style atmospherics help to drive the album. The doomy themes of 20th-century Cold War surveillance and 21st-century artificial intelligence are mirrored in the monochrome short films – produced in collaboration with Edwin Burdis from the Dah Dit Dit creative studio – accompanying it. Bunford and Ciarán also confirm a desire to conjure suitably dank and malignant vibes.

"At the start of recording, I bought my first synth in 20 years – a Polivoks, which is USSR-built," says Ciarán.

More than any individual acts the group might choose to mention, it's technology's pernicious hold over modern society and its liberating function as a musical mode that are of particular significance in the overarching vision of Das Koolies. While Ciarán namechecks 'I Feel Love' by Donna Summer and Hardfloor's 'Hardtrance Acperience' as informing their work, he suggests it's more about "pieces of kit".

"Giorgio Moroder said that if you want to make good dance music, you need a 303, an analogue drum machine and a Minimoog," he says. "So it's not necessarily about bands or artists. It was more what palette we were using."

"I think we always had trouble sticking to one genre in the Furries," adds Ieuan. "We had the habit of jumping around all over the place. Just imagine how much music we've heard over the last 20 years since the early demos. We never approached it thinking, 'This is the sound we want'. The gear influenced it more than anything."

Bunford, who in the mid-2010s studied Composing for Film and TV at the National Film and Television School (NFTS) at Beaconsfield Studios in Buckinghamshire, takes this one step further, emphasising how a sense of place also felt more notable than direct musical reference points.

This is illustrated by the field recordings he captured around the world throughout his years of touring with SFA.

"I got into making soundscapes, which had been impossible within traditional songwriting. I had hours of material. Instead of writing on tour, I used to record the experience of being in that particular country. I got the sounds of cicadas in Brazil, the rumbles of air conditioners in Tokyo, the jungle of Colombia – unique places that had the scope to work in the music and format of Das Koolies."

'DK.01' is a reflection of the effervescent imagination of these four individuals, joined in aural matrimony with the patience and dedication to make it happen.

The album title alludes to automation, which is also expressed in the production line rhythms and programmed beats of 'A Ride'. Shifting, slippery and cosmopolitan in sound, this is a record that feels as in touch with the fading memories of the underground North Wales rave scene of the band's youth as it does with the colours of the Amazon.

Acid squelches throughout 'Sky', the suitably driving 'Nuthin Sandwich' takes Gary Numan on a tour-bus ride into the USA's heart of darkness, while 'Montezuma' is an eerie, near 10-minute odyssey culminating in the spaghetti western trumpet solo that introduces 'Holy Shit'.

There are abundant reminders of the band's previous incarnation, which Ieuan says is an "inevitability". 'Pain Down The Drain' barrels in like 'Golden Retriever', 'Shakedown' has something of the South American exoticism of 'Northern Lites', while circling melodies, breezy harmonies and horn interludes come thick and fast. But how did Das Koolies square the no-frontman circle?

"The last thing we wanted to do is be the Furries minus Gruff," says Ieuan. "We had to do something that took us in a different direction, but obviously you're still going to have the residue of that attitude. We dropped the acoustic guitar, and none of the songs were written sat down behind a piano or with an acoustic [approach]. The essence was the beats and the music before we did any vocals."

"Some of Cian's material was pure techno," chips in Bunford. "We were used to that with Super Furry Animals, but there was always an element of trying to get a live feel to something electronic. Before we did any singing, we'd put in a guitar or bass and try to make it less electronic. With 'DK.01', we forgot about that and just wrote on top of a techno tune."

In this set-up and with a revolving cast of contributors, vocals simply become an additional layer to the instrumentation ("like mantras", says Ieuan) but with a much less notable or defining storytelling function.

"Initially there was some talk of doing a totally instrumental album," reveals Ieuan. "Then one night Bunf jumped on the mic a bit worse for wear and started singing. It sounded pretty cool. And that opened up a Pandora's box.

"So anytime someone had a vocal idea, we would have a mic open, and we decided to take that approach to vocals where it was like using samples. They're more soundbites than fully formed poetry."

"When the vocals are looped, it becomes quite repetitive and the brain switches off to create more of a percussive line," continues Ciarán. "It's not necessarily about the words – it's about the mood and the rhythm. That stems from old-school techno and house. The loop is fundamental."

"We hold each other's hands and sing together like proper Welsh people!" wisecracks Ieuan.

What about the name, Das Koolies? This is where Düsseldorf's finest come into it.

"We were recording 'Guerrilla' at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios near Bath in 1998," says Ieuan. "We were there for ages and had this mini stage where we set up four or five instruments, à la Kraftwerk. There was a dulcimer, a couple of synths – Cian's Behringer Pro-1 and a Moog Taurus – and a bare-bones drum kit. We'd get drunk and start jamming."

"It was our alter egos," continues Bunford, who is credited with determining the group's official name. "We always wanted to be in a band called 'The something'. I think it was Daf who suggested 'Das', which is German for 'the'. Then I saw the Matt Dillon film, 'To Die For'. It's a black comedy where he's in a band called The Coolies, with the name written on the drum skin."

In all this, there's an obvious elephant in the room. Super Furry Animals have not played together as a band since appearing at the Cardiff International Arena in December 2016. What are the chances of another reunion?

"I have no idea, but I wouldn't hold your breath," says Ieuan. "Never say never, but it looks highly unlikely at the minute."

It almost doesn't matter. With 'DK.01', Das Koolies are looking to the future, not the past. They are – to lean once again into Arnold Schwarzenegger's cinematic lexicon – "back".

**'DK.01' is released by Strangetown on 22 September**

# BRANCHING OUT

Expansive, lyrical and shot through with ideas around consciousness and an interconnected world, the latest long-player from Dot Allison may just be her best work yet

**WORDS: JONATHAN WRIGHT**

Singer and songwriter Dot Allison has, by her own estimation, been going "further down the rabbit hole". But don't worry, rather than disappearing into a mysterious netherworld, she remains "inquisitive" and retains "a sense of wonder". It's just her way of trying to explain how she approached her remarkable new album, 'Consciousology'. Much like her previous long-player, 2021's 'Heart-Shaped Scars', it's a conceptual collection that deals with "remaining rooted to nature", but there's a new element too.

"In lockdown, I became really interested in the study and location of consciousness," she says. "It's famously known as the hard problem. Is the mind located in the brain or not? And *where* is it? I was fascinated by this, so I wanted to make an album that allowed me to talk about it."

An answer of sorts to the hard problem lies down the aforementioned rabbit hole, at least if it's a burrow located in woodland. Canadian scientist Suzanne Simard's research into the "woodwide web", in which she showed how certain trees act as hubs for vast underground mycorrhizal networks, helped inspire one of the album's standout tracks, 'Mother Tree'.

"Trees communicate – they're societal," Allison says. "If a certain predator eats a tree, the tree puts out some sort of trauma signal via the network and then you'll find, for about 100 yards around, the trees won't be eaten. And it's because they've released tannins, having had the warning about the predator. It's so complex. This is us beginning to understand what we interrupt when we cut down the Caledonian Forest [the temperate woodland that once covered swathes of Scotland] and just plant pine trees. It'd be really weird if humans were the only thing in the universe that was truly conscious."

Instead, Allison thinks we're part of a "living quantum system" – judging by the abundance of ideas she has, drawing on science, philosophy and complexity theory, this clearly fills her with… well, wonder.

It's perhaps telling that before she decamped for life as a musician, initially with One Dove, Allison was a biochemistry undergraduate. Her father, who she dedicates 'Consciousology' to along with her musician mother, is a botanist. Where other songwriters might reach for a novel or poem to help give songs shape, Allison's approach is very different.

Both 'Mother Tree' and 'Unchanged' feature sound artist Dorit Chrysler on theremin. This was partly because the instrument works by generating electromagnetic fields.

"That made it the perfect instrument for me, working beyond the visible," Allison explains.

'220Hz' is named for the electromagnetic frequency at which tree roots communicate. 'Shyness Of Crowns' references how trees "socially distance" at their highest points, seemingly as a way to ensure they share resources and maintain their health.

On 'Double Rainbow', Allison recorded the electrical activity of a Brachyglottis "Sunshine" plant placed on top of a Steinway. The result is the world's first – and so far only – song to feature a botanical session player alongside Andy Bell (of Ride/GLOK fame) on guitar.

For all that it's filled with notions that could trip into tricksiness, there's an expansive warmth to 'Consciousology', an album where swirling electronica and organic sounds mingle unselfconsciously. The London Contemporary Orchestra, for example, perform arrangements by Hannah Peel on three tracks. In addition to more abstract cosmic themes, "love and loss" recur.

PHOTO: ROBBIE CRAWFORD

"I feel that the human condition is one of longing, because from the minute we are born, we're longing for a union," Allison muses. "We've had this union with our mother's body and then there's this, 'Where do I go?' kind of feeling. It's all part of the human condition – we spend our lives looking to return home somehow."

The fact that musicians such as Peel and Bell want to work with Allison says much about the esteem in which she's held. From another angle, her co-producer and engineer Fiona Cruickshank is a rising star, someone with both her own distinctive sound and the technical chops to help Allison oversee complex sessions with classical players.

"I have got quite particular ideas about what I want," Allison says. "It was just nice to have somebody that's there as a partner, to share the burden, to jointly think about things and to be a brilliant sounding board."

The confident reference to particular ideas is a reminder of Allison's longevity as a musician. Early in her career, she was championed by the late Andrew Weatherall, who co-produced One Dove's 'Morning Dove White' in 1993. 'Heart-Shaped Scars' was dedicated to Weatherall, while the delicate 'Weeping Roses' on 'Consciousology' references a mix tape the DJ/producer made for her, featuring folk singer Tim Hardin. She's glad she got the chance to tell him how much he helped her.

"I recognised that Andrew had been a massive influence on me while he was still here," she reveals.

One Dove broke up while recording an unreleased second album. In 1999, Allison released her debut solo album, 'Afterglow'. Latterly, she has worked with the likes of Massive Attack, Paul Weller, Kevin Shields, Mick Harvey, and the late Scott Walker on 'Soused', the LP he made with Sunn O))).

For much of this century's second decade she didn't record, primarily because she was busy raising her children after returning from many years in London to live in her native Edinburgh.

"I thought I'd retired," she says.

But the music still flowed, and she became increasingly interested in the "craft of songwriting".

Arguably, her absence has only added to her mystique – and there is definitely something mysterious about Dot Allison. While she's friendly and communicates clearly how she thinks about her work, there's nevertheless a sense of talking to someone whose creativity sometimes surprises even her. It would be fascinating to see her new songs played live, but that seems rather unlikely anytime soon.

"I've always been gripped with fear," she says of performance.

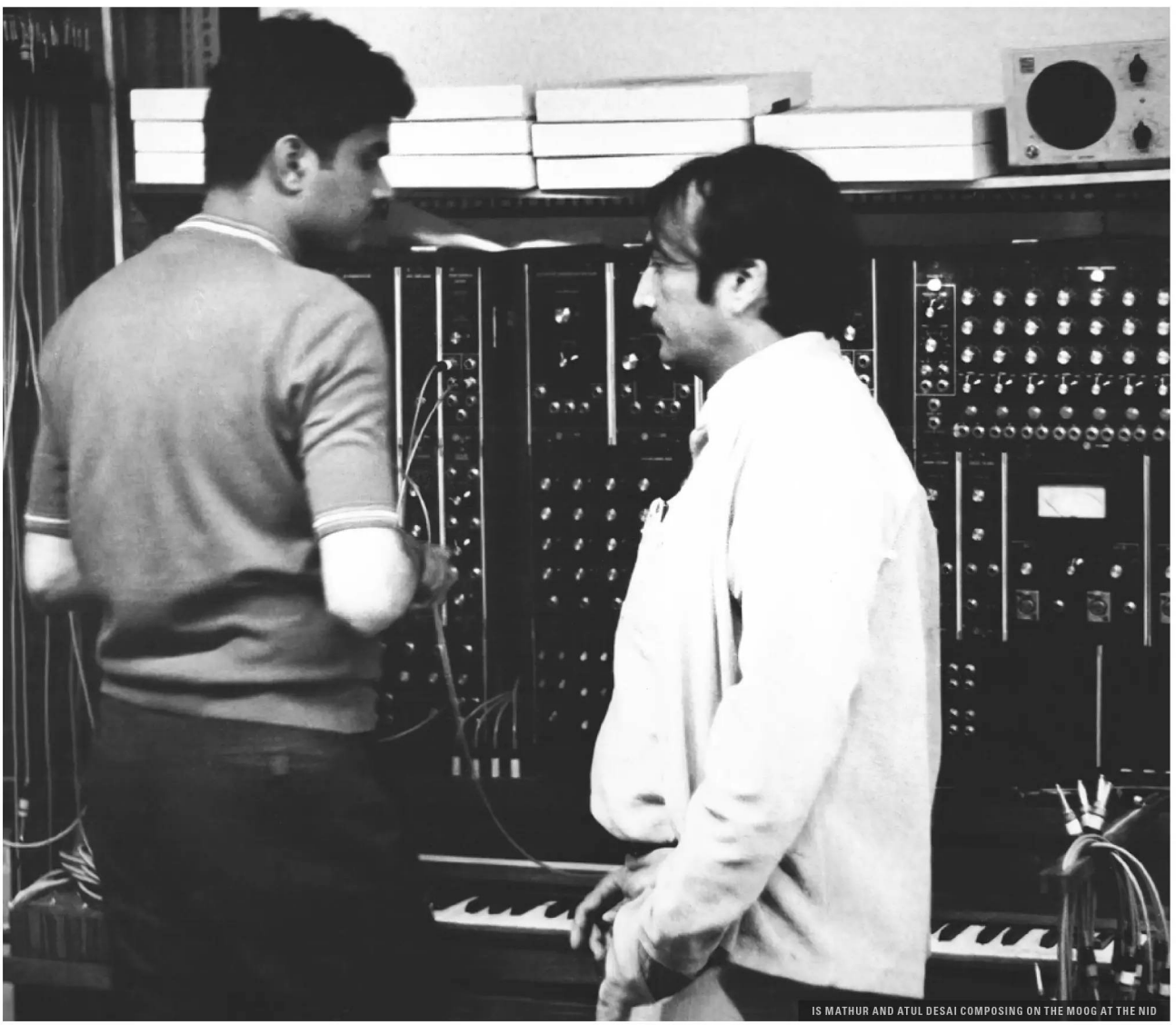
She adds that she may consider working live in a trio. It's likely, though, that these would be acoustic gigs rather than electronic. They may even feature the ukulele – she loves the sound of its strings when they're plucked, although she says she's "not a strummer"– and reflect a love of folk music rekindled by her move back up north to Scotland.

Then again, seeing electronic and folk music as separate is perhaps misleading. Allison is a fan of American electronic pioneer and composer Laurie Spiegel.

"Laurie once said she saw electronic music as folk music," Allison says. "That's really interesting. Because I suppose folk music is music of the people, so it's whatever the people are expressing."

**'Consciousology' is out now on Sonic Cathedral**

# THE INDIA CONNECTION



IS MATHUR AND ATUL DESAI COMPOSING ON THE MOOG AT THE NID

# 'The NID Tapes' is an extraordinary compilation of early Indian electronic tracks recorded at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad between 1969 and 1972. Sound artist Paul Purgas relays the story of how he uncovered these long-forgotten gems

**WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN**

It all started with a tweet. In 2016, the London-based multidisciplinary artist Paul Purgas unsuspectingly clicked on a link that would change the course of his life forever. The article within said tweet – 'Subcontinental Synth: David Tudor And The First Moog In India', written by Alexander Keefe – was originally published in 2013 and had been retweeted by a music journalist Purgas followed. It told the labyrinthine tale of how a Moog synthesiser ended up at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, India, in 1969.

For Purgas, a British-Asian electronic musician who'd come from an architectural design background, it seemed like a no-brainer to pursue a narrative that potentially connected strands of design history, South Asia and electronic music.

"It just seemed like a fascinating story," he enthuses, sitting across from me in an elegant bar tucked away in the basement of London's Somerset House, where his studio is located. "So I decided to go to Ahmedabad and learn more – I'd been touring with my band Emptyset and I had a lot of air miles piled up."

So in 2017, he made his first trip to India to find out more.

This month sees the release of double album 'The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969-1972' on the State51 Conspiracy label. Curated by Purgas, it features recordings from American experimentalist David Tudor, Indian classical musician Gita Sarabhai and four all-but-forgotten electronic composers – Atul Desai, IS Mathur, SC Sharma and Jinraj Joshipura, who was just 19 years old when he joined the facility. The last surviving composer from the National Institute of Design, Joshipura is now living and teaching in Puerto Rico.

'The NID Tapes' is the culmination so far of a story that winds and twists, with Purgas' accidental intervention crucial to uncovering a lost history of the country's electronic avant-garde.

Since his first mission of discovery, Purgas has made a lauded BBC Radio 3 documentary, 2020's 'Electronic India'. There's a book in November, edited by Purgas and published by Strange Attractor Press. And if that weren't enough, there's also a dynamic exhibition and sound installation curated by Purgas – 'We Found Our Own Reality' – which has made its way from Camden to Berlin and Glasgow and promises to keep moving.

While the projects that have sprung from the source keep proliferating, we must start with the synthesiser, which became an unobtainable object of Purgas' infatuation.

"I naively thought I could find that Moog," he tells me, referring to the model that ended up at the NID in 1969.

In truth, he came close, although it looked as if he might ultimately go home empty-handed.

"I'd spoken to Moog and had been given their blessing to restore the synthesiser if it could be found. So I went out to Ahmedabad and made contact with the owner, who was a former faculty member."

The owner, who has since passed away, was not as forthcoming as Purgas had hoped, and actually seemed suspicious of his motives. The instrument was apparently resting in a home for stray cats and dogs on the outskirts of the city near the airport.

"I'd been told there were termites living in it, but it was in good health," says Purgas. "So it was a complex and strange encounter."

Having failed to secure the Golden Fleece, he decided to look through the archives at the NID with a view to finding photographs.

"Digging more closely, I found a book of handwritten notes from the late 1960s," he remembers. "There was a note that said, 'Tapes for David'. It immediately piqued my interest, so I asked the lady working there, 'Can you get these tapes?'."

A cupboard was located, and out came the motherlode.

India's first Moog synthesiser arrived in Ahmedabad in several wooden crates from Trumansburg, New York, in 1969. There was no keyboard attached at the outset, although it did have a linear ribbon controller. The avant-garde composer and pianist David Tudor took receipt of the machine and installed it at the NID electronic music studio he had established there that same year.

Tudor – who is said to have been ambivalent towards Moogs and to Bob Moog himself – is perhaps best-known as the musician who performed many of John Cage's works, including '4'33"'. He became an important figure in avant-garde sound design following his involvement with the Pepsi Pavilion at Osaka's Expo '70 – allegedly to Cage's chagrin. Purgas has found that people in his own milieu are either Team Cage or Team Tudor.

"I definitely lean more towards Tudor," he reveals. "And actually, the more I've learned about his story, the more I've discovered about him keeping in touch with some of the composers at the NID – right into the 1980s. It seems he was very authentically invested in supporting that scene and culture, which I think is a beautiful thing."

The Moog would become the centrepiece of a faculty where Indian electronic music was effectively born.

"What I hadn't realised from reading the initial article was actually the magical context of the NID," says Purgas. "The idea of this type of modernist architecture and radical pedagogy that you associate with the Bauhaus. Seeing that in India was exceptionally mind-expanding."

This freedom in the name of discovery was contrary to most Westerners' perception of India at that time, which was exacerbated by The Beatles visiting the Maharishi for an extended stay in 1968. Seeking spiritual enlightenment with the tools of ancient religious practice could be regarded as retrogressive. A Moog synthesiser, on the other hand, represented a mythical future rather than a mystical past, and fired the imagination at a time when space exploration was becoming a reality.

Fast forward to 2017, and compositions that had been carelessly discarded – not thought important enough to preserve for posterity – and presumed lost were suddenly presented to Purgas in several towering piles. He could only imagine what might be sonically imprinted on these magnetic spools, and his initial excitement was soon overridden by an urge to preserve everything he had found.

"Realising the value and importance of the material, my first instinct soon switched into the mode of conservationist," he recalls. "I felt I had a responsibility to learn how to preserve and restore these tapes. This is essentially the electronic music culture of a billion people.

"So I came back to the UK and contacted the British Library Sound Archive, who were incredibly generous and gave me a lot of advice and feedback. I actually took a whole year to learn tape conservation with them before returning to India in 2018 with my own TEAC tape deck, a food dehydrator like an oven to bake the tapes, and splicing tape – the whole kit – in order to go and do it myself."

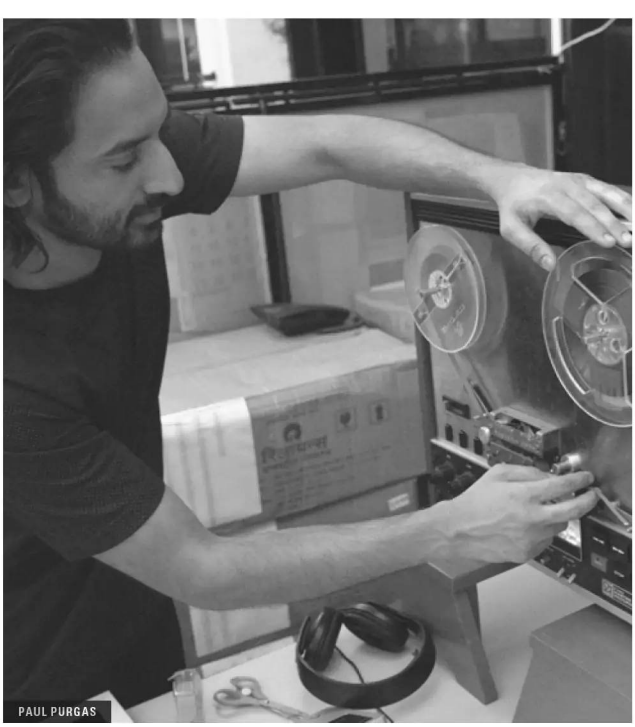
That year of preparation and delayed gratification turned out to be worth it when Purgas had finished restoring the tapes and finally got to hear what was on them. Which track spoke to him the most?

"The one that jumped out at me was one of the final compositions at the studio by SC Sharma, simply called 'Dance Music'," he says. "It's a series of three compositions that are a kind of rhythmic proto-techno from September 1972. When I first picked it up, it fell apart in my hands because it was about 100 tape edits stuck together with Sellotape that had lost its adhesion. So it took me almost a day to reassemble that reel. To hear that coming out of 1970s India was just magic."

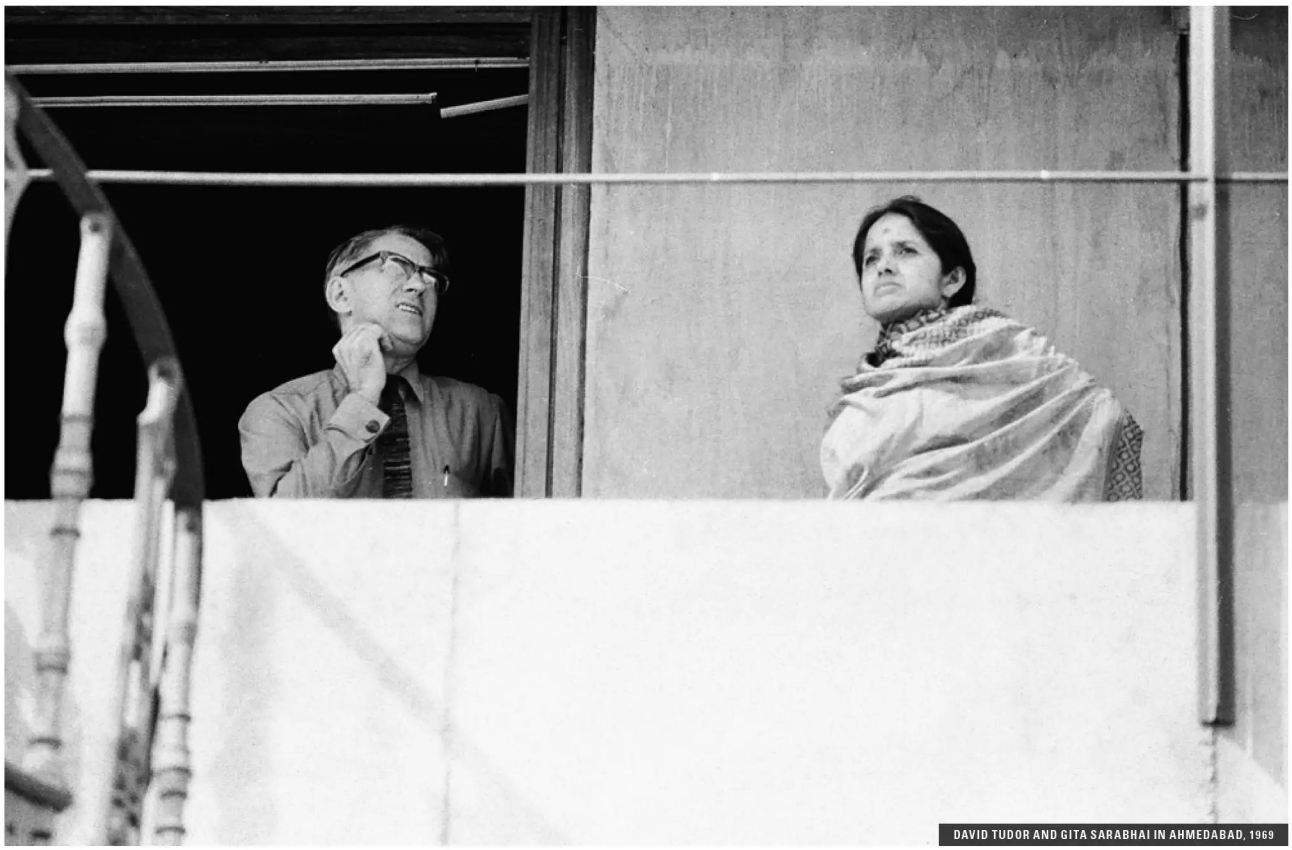
Geopolitical forces largely enabled the NID, and ultimately it would be geopolitical forces that closed it down in its original incarnation before it had really begun. Funding for the school had been provided by New York's Ford Foundation and it was run by the Sarabhai family – well-connected industrialists who'd staunchly supported Mahatma Gandhi's campaign for Indian freedom from British rule (the country gained independence in 1947). The generation of Sarabhais following these peaceful insurgents had been ingrained with a taste for radicalism and altruism.

In 1961, Gira and Gautam Sarabhai – musician Gita Sarabhai's siblings – helped establish the NID in accordance with recommendations from The India Report, commissioned by the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and prepared by 20th century modernist design titans Charles and Ray Eames. As a young country recently emancipated from British colonial control, India was finding its way as any free-spirited teenager might, with experimentation the order of the day. A technocratic revolution beckoned, or so it seemed at the time.

Gita Sarabhai, meanwhile, forged strong links with the post-war avant-garde in the US. In the mid-1960s, she learned the rudiments of Western musical theory and 12-tone serialism from John Cage. In exchange, Sarabhai introduced Cage to Indian classical music and philosophy. Their close association would inevitably lead to an acquaintance with Tudor.



PAUL PURGAS



DAVID TUDOR AND GITA SARABHAI IN AHMEDABAD, 1969

A honeymoon period ensued within a pedagogical programme pitched somewhere between the Montessori method and the Bauhaus. Anomalous though the NID sound studio was – situated in a design school as opposed to the radio-based Studio D'Essai, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk or the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop – its modus operandi of sonic exploration was broadly the same. Jinraj Joshipura was looking beyond trying to incorporate the oscillations of the Moog with traditional music, and instead was considering ways in which electronic music could communicate with animals or send signals to submarines.

This brief rush of creativity was to be short-lived, however. Funding from foreign sources, including the Ford Foundation, subsided and the administration came under scrutiny from the Indian government. As the department declined, it looked as if Joshipura would transfer to the Rockefeller Music Research Centre in San Diego to study sound synthesis after a recommendation from Tudor, but he was talked out of it by his pragmatic father, who told him to continue his architectural studies. Yet his Moog explorations were far from over – his fascination persists to this day, much to Purgas' delight.

"I went into the project believing everyone had passed away, so discovering Jinraj was beyond magical," says Purgas. "He is an incredibly passionate person, still very interested after almost 50 years' absence from electronic music, and now very much reinspired. It's a personal dream to reconnect Jinraj with the Moog and to try to get him to return to making electronic music. To me, that would be a really beautiful end to the story, and in a way that would complete the circle."

The story doesn't end there, either. As mentioned earlier, Purgas' exhibition 'We Found Our Own Reality' – a National Institute of Design soundwork located within a configuration of architectural and design components – may soon be coming to an art space near you. There are echoes of the NID in a "topographic framework referencing modernist architecture as well as India's powerful textile industry, and South Asian ancient religious and mathematical traditions".

Alongside the installation will be a series of one-off performances connected to the original source material. Earlier this year, at Silent Green in Berlin, Purgas played a specially hired Moog Model 10 – offering a functionality as close as possible to the nascent Moog at the NID – with collaborative contributions from filmmaker Imran Perretta and rising producer Nabihah Iqbal.

Purgas talks at length about seeking out later works by SC Sharma and his hopes of finding a lost soundtrack by Gita Sarabhai for Akbar Padamsee's 1969 film, 'Events In A Cloud Chamber'. But it occurs to me that he's far from finished with subcontinental synthesis or indeed the NID.

"I'm now entangled for life," he admits with a laugh. "And I still feel bound to the Moog itself as an object. So I keep an eye on its trajectory and its care."

**'The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969-1972' is released by The State51 Conspiracy on 29 September. You can preorder copies of the album at electronicsound.co.uk/shop**

# DEL BOYS

On ‘Tall Vision-Of-The-Voyage’, their ambitious second album, experimental London producers Delmer Darion delve deep into their diverse sound world

**WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES**

Delmer Darion have turned up to our interview with their manager, Tristan. It’s telling, but not in any overbearing or micromanaging way. He really just wants to hear Tom Lenton and Oliver Jack talk about their new album over a pint in a Farringdon pub. This lack of pretence is a trademark of the Delmer Darion camp, with the erudite duo both secure in their own contributions, but still far keener to talk one another up than draw any spotlight on themselves.

Delmer Darion’s sound world, first explored on their 2020 debut album, ‘Morning Pageants’, is the sort of place only accessible by a Willy Wonka-style elevator. Tom and Oliver immerse their listeners in medias res, collaging degraded samples with acoustic instruments, dark electronica and spoken word, while carefully crafted songs replete with strident lyrics drift in and out of focus. It’s both beautiful and unsettling.

Their follow-up album, ‘Tall Vision-Of-The-Voyage’, builds on the unique approaches that characterise ‘Morning Pageants’. Amid epic shoegaze, ambient, industrial and “doom-folk” hues, its collection of stories about “human spirit, ambition and the reckless naivety of great adventurers” – think Robert Falcon Scott, Henry Segrave and William Beebe – delves even further into Delmer Darion’s strange sonic realm.

Former schoolmates Tom and Oliver first bonded over a shared love of music and the finer points of cinema, later naming their band after a character in Paul Thomas Anderson’s epic and quirky 1999 psychological drama, ‘Magnolia’. It’s an apt moniker, reflecting the film’s surreal collision of things that are ordinarily unassociated.

“I first saw Tom playing drums in Battle Of The Bands when I was 11,” says Oliver. “He was onstage with his older brother’s band and I was in the crowd. I just thought, ‘He is so *cool*!’.”

Both of them fall about laughing.

"But you were switched on to electronic music far earlier than I was," says Tom. "I was starting to play guitar, with a kind of singer-songwriter angle, and you showed me a song you'd made that was full of reversed piano chords."

"You mean, finding the 'reverse' button in Ableton!" interjects Oliver wryly.

"It was like nothing I'd ever heard," insists Tom. "I thought, 'Holy shit, this is beautiful', because it's this nice piano sound. I started to get it. I don't think we could really make music in the way we do without having those 17 years of gradually building a... telepathy. The tastes we have, the things we like.

"There's a big part of me that just wants whatever I'm making to be really cool and interesting. But at least as big as that, if not bigger, is the feeling of wanting to make something Olly is going to listen to and be like, 'Oh, *shit*!'."

The sentiment is clearly mutual.

"It's an anxious wait for the message to come back once you've sent the WeTransfer link," agrees Oliver. "And you just know the difference between Tom saying, 'Oh, nice one', and him going 'Booooom, this is crazy!'. It drives a productive sense of competition – like, my part needs to be as good as yours."

If the duo's appetite for collaboration was tangible on 'Morning Pageants', it's front and centre on 'Tall Vision-Of-The-Voyage'. Featuring a veritable roll call of their favourite singers and instrumentalists, including Anna B Savage and Bingo Fury, the album's second half is exclusively devoted to the astonishingly ambitious 'Lolaire'.

The four-part, 20-minute epic features the virtuoso cello of Mabe Fratti and the lilting narration of none other than Morfydd Clark – the Welsh actor better-known to many as Galadriel in the Amazon Prime mega-series, 'The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power'. Morfydd's contribution was recorded before her ascent to mainstream success, but as far as Tom and Oliver are concerned, this is a footnote.

"That really didn't figure in why we asked her," says Tom. "We asked her because we saw [2020 horror flick] 'Saint Maud', and we both absolutely adored it. We thought she was incredible. When we came to having 'Lolaire' drafted, one of the strands in it was basically an ancient Welsh Arthurian legend. And we thought, 'Right, within those constraints, if we could have anybody in the world, who would we have? Fuck it – we'll try!'."

It's fair to say the resulting track is rather staggering, and what's even more impressive is that Delmer Darion have actually managed to pull it off. 'Lolaire' ends up somewhere between Laurie Anderson, Boards Of Canada at their most dystopian and, well, 'The Lord Of The Rings', while being firmly planted in Delmer Darion's world.

I tell them I don't think I've ever heard of a band attempting something like it before, let alone allocating the lion's share of a second album to it. But it's not the first time Delmer Darion's exciting inventiveness has been observed on these pages.

Tristan has been attentively quiet for most of our conversation, but he fondly recalls an Electronic Sound write-up of 'Morning Pageants' back in 2020 – a critical reception, he earnestly insists, that they did not expect.

"It was crazy and ridiculous – the review called it a 'paradigm shift'," he recalls. "A paradigm shift in underground electronic music!"

And 'Tall Vision-Of-The-Voyage' could well be another one. But when it comes to Delmer Darion's intricate and attention-grabbing music, this paradigm shift is unlikely to be a Billie Eilish-style assault on culture at large. We laugh, but it's true. Instead, they're more likely to fly under the radar, gradually converting evangelised listeners one by one.

The Delmer Darion brand of innovation is an undemonstrative and reliably brilliant one, humming away with a blend of unbridled ambition and slow-release energy. To this end, it's almost frustrating that they're only two albums in.

**'Tall Vision-Of-The-Voyage' is out now on Practise Music**

# HEAT TREATMENTS

## JOE GIBBS & THE PROFESSIONALS

**100 Years Of Dub**

DOCTOR BIRD

You've got your Berlins and your Düsseldorfs. You've got your New Yorks and your Tokyos. You've got your Sheffields and your Manchesters. But if we're thinking about the places that twirled the spiralling popularity of electronic music in the 1970s, we shouldn't forget Kingston, Jamaica, the city that gave us a seemingly endless supply of incredible dub records, many of the best of them bearing the name Joe Gibbs.

'100 Years Of Dub' is an inspired title – it's also the title of the first of the 48 tracks on this double CD, a perky overhaul of Jimmy London's plaintive 'Am I That Easy To Forget' – even if it's misleading. Everything here actually dates from between 1975 and 1978, at which point Joe Gibbs was at the top of his game, producing artists like Dennis Brown, Gregory Isaacs, Culture, Marcia Aitken, The Mighty Diamonds, Prince Far I and Trinity, releasing their records on one of his multitude of labels, and notching up more than 100 Number One hits in Jamaica in the process.

Despite his local triumphs, beyond his homeland Gibbs is probably better known for his dub excursions. Most notably for his five 'African Dub' albums and most particularly the truly magnificent 'African Dub Chapter 3', one of the records that helped turn legions of UK punks on to reggae. But while those albums have been reissued numerous times over the years, all of the cuts on '100 Years Of Dub' were originally found on the B-sides of singles, as were the majority of dub versions at the time, and many of them haven't been available for decades. Not without unwanted scuffs, scratches and skips.

Gibbs was a genius when it came to utilising the mixing desk as a musical instrument, as was his long-time engineer Errol "ET" Thompson, who started working at Gibbs' studio in the Cross Roads district of Kingston in 1972. They always came as a pair, with a big chunk of their productions credited to The Mighty Two, and they generally operated at speed, creating tracks from other tracks in quick live takes. From the ultra-heavy 'I Stand Accused', a radical deconstruction of Gregory Isaacs' 'Babylon Too Rough', to the rapturous 'No Bones For The Dogs', a madcap romp based on Alton Ellis' 'Why Birds Follow Spring', what they managed to achieve with 16 channels and a smattering of basic effects is awesome.

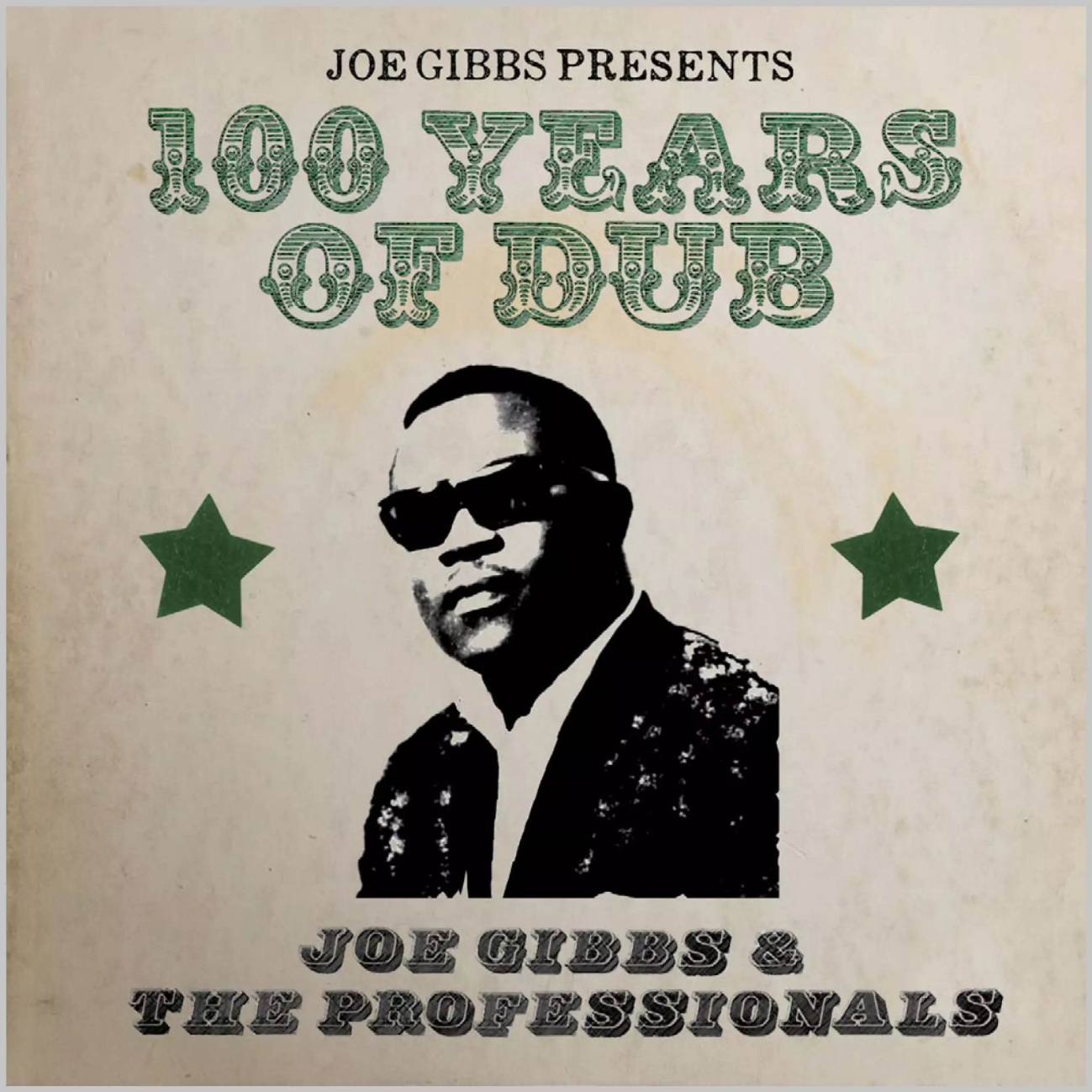
With the invaluable help of The Professionals, a fluid outfit boasting some of Jamaica's finest musicians of the day, it was the tight, warm, all-enveloping sound Gibbs and Thompson crafted that made their productions really stand out. And it didn't matter whether they'd stripped something down to just the bass and drums, as with long sections of 'Black September Version', which is vaguely recognisable as Dennis Brown's 'Equal Rights', or gone nuts with the reverb, delay and filtering, as on the reworking of Ruddy Thomas' 'Memories By The Score'. Select pretty much any track and the heat is on from the first beat to the last. Listen closely – and the trick is to listen extremely closely – and you'll soon be sweating.

As well as 'African Dub Chapter 3', two more Joe Gibbs favourites with the punky reggae party crowd were Culture's 'Two Sevens Clash' and Trinity's 'Three Piece Suit' albums. '100 Years Of Dub' has four Culture and four Trinity treatments and they provide some of the hottest moments. The 'Fulfilment' version of 'Two Sevens Clash' is especially strong, with wave upon wave of echo crashing in and a string of raucous pronouncements from Bojangles, a DJ who liked to toast in the style of a horse racing commentator. 'Roots Kunta Kinte', the B-side of Trinity's 'John Saw Them Coming', meanwhile spins Bob Marley's 'Hypocrites' riddim into another dimension. It features the sounds of roaring racing cars and bubbling boiling water too. What a treat.

Fast forward a little and Joe Gibbs' career came to an abrupt end in 1983, following a legal dispute over a cover of a song by American country singer Charley Pride. It cost him a fortune. He shut down his studio and opened up a supermarket instead, employing the ever-loyal Errol Thompson as the store manager, a position ET continued to hold for much of the rest of his life. The two men returned to the music industry in the 1990s, but only briefly and with limited success. Fast forward again, this time to the 2000s, and they sadly died within four years of each other – Thompson in 2004 and Gibbs in 2008, aged 55 and 65, respectively.

'100 Years Of Dub' is a fascinating glimpse inside the less familiar parts of the vast back catalogue The Mighty Two left behind. OK, there are three or four weak choices – the cartoony 'Bubbler In Money' interpretation of Dennis Brown's splendid 'Money In My Pocket', for instance – but it is a mere three or four. Balance those against their dub versions of Marcia Aitken's 'Narrow Minded Man', Prince Alla's 'Naw Go A Them Burial', Sylford Walker's 'Burn Babylon' and Dolphin Morris' 'Su-Su-Pan Rasta', to give a few more of the highlights of this tasty collection a passing mention, and there's no contest. None whatsoever. The heat wins every time.

**PUSH**


JOE GIBBS PRESENTS
100 YEARS OF DUB
JOE GIBBS &
THE PROFESSIONALS

## HIDDEN HORSE

**Incorporeal**

HOLUZAM

Hidden Horse is the side project of Beautify Junkyards' Tony Watts and João Kyron, and 'Incorporeal' follows on from their 2022 debut, 'Opala'. If that album was a darker iteration of the Portuguese group's haunted tropicalia, these pieces intensify the aesthetic even further. 'Espectros No CCTV', featuring Clothilde, echoes and rumbles around post-rave reflections, while 'Shapeshift' funnels its spookiness through broken beats and unsettling vocal samples, recalling the work of Leeds collective Urban Exploration, but delivered with heat and very close humidity. **ST**

## PMXPER

**Lavender Milk**

LE JAZZ NON SERIES / SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

This beautifully unassuming album is the result of a new collaboration between Perila (aka Aleksandra Zakharenko) and Pavel Milyakov (aka Buttechno). Produced remotely, 'Osouro' was the only track recorded with both artists in the same room. Pmxper's debut gets its hooks into you by stealth. Zakharenko's spoken-word vocals are underpinned by field recordings, guitar, saxophone, washes of jazz percussion and a 1960s Rhythm Ace FR-3 drum machine. The gorgeous, thrumming 'Stitch' is a highlight, as is the shadowy 'Irrigation', which will appeal to fans of HTRK and Leslie Winer. Undeniably addictive. **CF**

## FOGROOM

**The Brownian Vortex**

DOOMSHIRE TAPES

For those who failed GCSE Physics, it's the random movement of particles suspended within a gas or liquid. But don't worry, no formal qualifications are required here. German producer Jörg Follert – also variously known as Mimsy and Wechsel Garland – has taken inspiration from early 20th century occultist painter Austin Osman Spare. And the resulting ambience itself feels both fantastical and appropriately antiquarian. 'The Moon So Big' is a sepulchral, sepia-tinted drone, while 'Telescope' is the wheezing of torn, haunted bellows. Magically disquieting. **BF**

## EXPERIMENTS & OBSERVATIONS ON ELECTRICITY

**Experiments & Observations On Electricity**

CULT IMAGE MUSIC

Named after Benjamin Franklin's 1751 disquisition, presumably, Experiments & Observations On Electricity is London's Craig Thompson, whose influences reportedly range from Tangerine Dream to Tim Hecker to early OMD and back again. This eponymous album of soundscapes is his debut, and it sports a nice mix of the melancholic, the moody and the mysterious – particularly on 'Part 1' and 'Part 2' of 'Heavy Rain Approaching' which make for mystifying but fruitful listens. **IB**

NATION OF LANGUAGE

## NATION OF LANGUAGE

**Strange Disciple**

PIAS

American indie-electronic trio Nation Of Language return with their third full-length offering, 'Strange Disciple', and once again they've produced a stirringly confessional album that looks to find a way forward from the sound of their previous release (which was titled 'A Way Forward', ironically). And while it's true that their tendency to emulate groups like New Order and Depeche Mode can at times become tiresome, there are some real gems here, not least the opener, 'Weak In Your Light', which is celestial and heart-wrenching in equal measure. **IB**

## KMRU / ABUL MOGARD

**Drawing Water**

A SUNKEN MALL

Originally self-released in 2020, 'Drawing Water' is a fuzzy triptych of unsettling analogue vignettes by Berlin-based Kenyan sound artist KMRU. Melodic snippets drift through a sticky, thick ferric hiss, as though intimately captured with a small tape recorder. Using those pieces as source material, Abul Mogard (aka Italian musician Guido Zen) adds a new track to this reissue, 'Drawing Water On Matching Teal Surfaces'. It's a glacial amalgam that replaces the static of KMRU's pieces with funereal creep, its chimes and tones interlocking into one elongated and slowly intensifying drone. **ST**

## MIKE DICKINSON

**The Ghost Of Pennyman Hall And Other Tales**

BANDCAMP

James and Ruth Pennyman were the final incumbents of Ormesby Hall, a stately home now subsumed by the suburbs of Middlesbrough. On a recent visit, Teessider Dickinson felt inspired to tell their story through proggy synth workouts. 'Jamie's War' moves from dark ambience to pounding drums, reflecting its subject's harrowing First World War experiences, while 'Oberon's Garden' is a beatific hymn to Ruth's predilection for staging Shakespeare on the expansive lawns. A generous patron of the arts for working class families, she'd have been flattered by this charming collection. **BF**

## SPEAKER MUSIC

**Techxodus**

PLANET MU

As Speaker Music, 'Make Techno Black Again' core activist, writer, and celebrated musician DeForrest Brown Jr is creating some of the most crucial contemporary art around right now. Where 2020's hauntingly poignant 'Black Nationalist Sonic Weaponry' was immediate and urgent, 'Techxodus' sounds more developed and refined. The weaponry remains the same – electronic rhythms, layered percussion and wailing horns, jubilant yet undercut by sadness and pain. 'Jes Grew' is the culmination of Speaker Music's sonic ideology, his continuation of the Drexciyan tradition, built upon the bedrock of Black America. **FH**

AUNTY RAYZOR

## AUNTY RAYZOR

**Viral Wreckage**

HAKUNA KULALA

There's no denying 'Viral Wreckage' is virulent and deadly in execution. When you come into contact with its crisp Afro beats, trap-like bass and atmospherics, and Bisola Olungbenga's alacritous rap flow, you certainly run the risk of being infected. The Lagos MC, who's built a formidable reputation for her magnificent freestyle in Nigeria, comes out fighting on the opener 'Stuttrap', and there's no real let-up after that. The final track, 'Sise', even manages to up the ante, with the help of rising Congolese guitar hero, Titi Bakorta. **JA**

## POWDERS

**Concede To Circumstance**

THEM THERE

'Concede To Circumstance' grew out of a live collaboration between Preston musicians Carl Brown and Joshua Horsley, and its seven pieces are at their most engaging when Brown's electronics kick against Horsley's gorgeous cello swoops. 'Embalming' is a kind of gathering of thoughts, filled with low-key potential like old video game menu-screen music, reflecting the pair's shared love of early PlayStation games. As the album progresses, 'Miley Tunnel' and 'Jum' see those fragmentary cello arcs crystallise beneath climactic effects into something heavier, both sonically and emotionally. **ST**

## PENELOPE ANTENA

**James & June**

PARAPENTE MUSIC

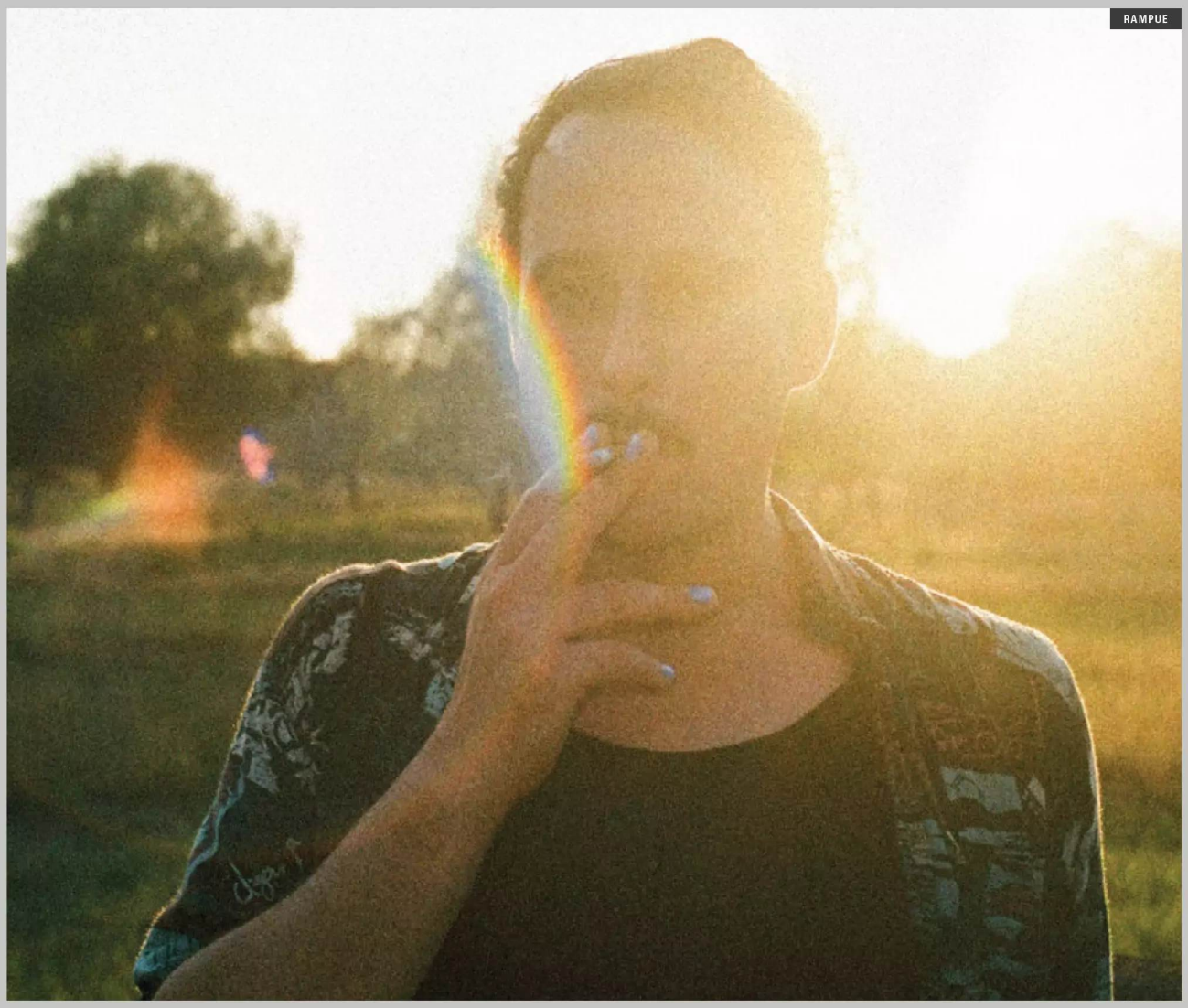
Want to feel ancient? She's the granddaughter of Telex founder Marc Moulin. This louche assembly of "love notes, quietly tucked away" owes more to grandad's early career as an acclaimed jazz pianist, but Antena's tender torch songs are underpinned by unsettling electronic drones, perfectly encapsulating both the splendour and insecurity of burgeoning romance. The chattering beats and mournful theremin of 'Enough' sum up the feeling perfectly. "Am I loving you too much? / Will I ever be enough?" It's a question we've all had to ask, and sometimes even answer. **BF**

## PETER BREWIS

**Blowdry Colossus**

DAYLIGHT SAVING

With his first solo outing since 2008, Field Music's Peter Brewis offers us his love letter to all things analogue in this knowing exploration of landmark electronic keyboard instrumentalism. 'Blowdry Colossus' nods subtly to the likes of Yellow Magic Orchestra, Kraftwerk (see the wonderfully nutty 'Lemoncadabra') and The KLF, among many others, rendering everything with a truly idiosyncratic sheen of invention. For all that though, perhaps the highlight is 'Dog Bark Dark', the sole vocal track that sets Brewis' inimitably expressive voice against quirkily primitive Conrad Schnitzler-esque electronics. **CG**


RAMPUE

## RAMPUE
**Bubblebath Trance**
A TRIBE CALLED KOTORI

Trance? No, not really. It's an engagingly inventive album that swerves easy categorisation. Berlin producer Daniel Krajnyak seems to have approached every track from an interesting angle – 'Schattenschranz' sees him use dub effects to construct a tropical techno workout, while 'Take Away' employs a two-step beat to create a rippling hypnotic shuffler. Krajnyak has been releasing records for over two decades, but 'Bubblebath Trance' sounds fresh and imaginative and, despite clocking in at over an hour, it's never once boring. **WS**

## A TAUT LINE
**Never Any Gain**
DISKOTOPIA

As co-founder of the Diskotopia label, Matt Lyne has overseen a wealth of vibrant electronica and dance music releases, including a number of his own works as A Taut Line. 'Never Any Gain' builds on 'Distraction Provisions' and 'Loss', his albums of 2017 and 2022 respectively, and his sound becomes increasingly more polished. A sun-licked, downtempo sound shines throughout, especially the cheerful, housey number 'Neutral Buoyancy', while three collaborations with vocalist Chocola B – especially 'Colour Science' – reinterpret city pop into a still smiling, but somewhat less optimistic product. **FH**

## AROVANE
**Polymer**
QUIET DETAILS

The latest album on Quiet Details comes from German musician Uwe Zahn under the Arovane alias that he's used since the 1990s. Like all the releases in the label's series, the structures and soundscapes that make up 'Polymer' are so ephemeral and translucent , they feel almost imaginary. The title track is the centrepiece here, consisting of little more than a thin drone, a barely audible woodblock tick and what sounds like processed, time-stretched Tibetan singing bowls. A delicate, lovely collection. **MS**

## SYD DEPALMA
**El Lugar De Arder**
RASO ESTUDIO

Syd DePalma is the alias of Spanish electronic musician and multi-instrumentalist Milton Castellar. His mysterious alter ego, DePalma, makes rich psychedelic soundscapes laced with accessible pop hooks, as on the opening track 'La Uno'. Elsewhere there's a dovetailing of futuristic sounds with traditional instruments – like on the standout 'El Patio', where synthetic strings, slinky sax and distorted bass meet handclaps and the emphatic foot stomp rhythm of flamenco. It's an uncanny, intoxicating brew, exotic and alien, and just a little bit mystical too. A magnetic debut. **JA**

COURTESY

## COURTESY
**Fra Eufori**
KULØR

Pop hits from Madonna and Enya, reworked with hardware synths? In a surprise move, the debut LP from Danish producer and DJ Courtesy – best-known as a champion of trance-inflected techno – is essentially a covers concept album of trance-pop tunes from the 1990s and early 2000s. Courtesy enlists a host of vocal collaborators, including a celestial Lyra Pramuk on Chicane's 'Saltwater', and Swedish singer Merely with a breezy version of 'Orinoco Flow'. As the album title (Danish for "From Euphoria") suggests, feel-good fun is the name of the game. **CF**

## WILL SAMSON
**Harp Swells**
12K

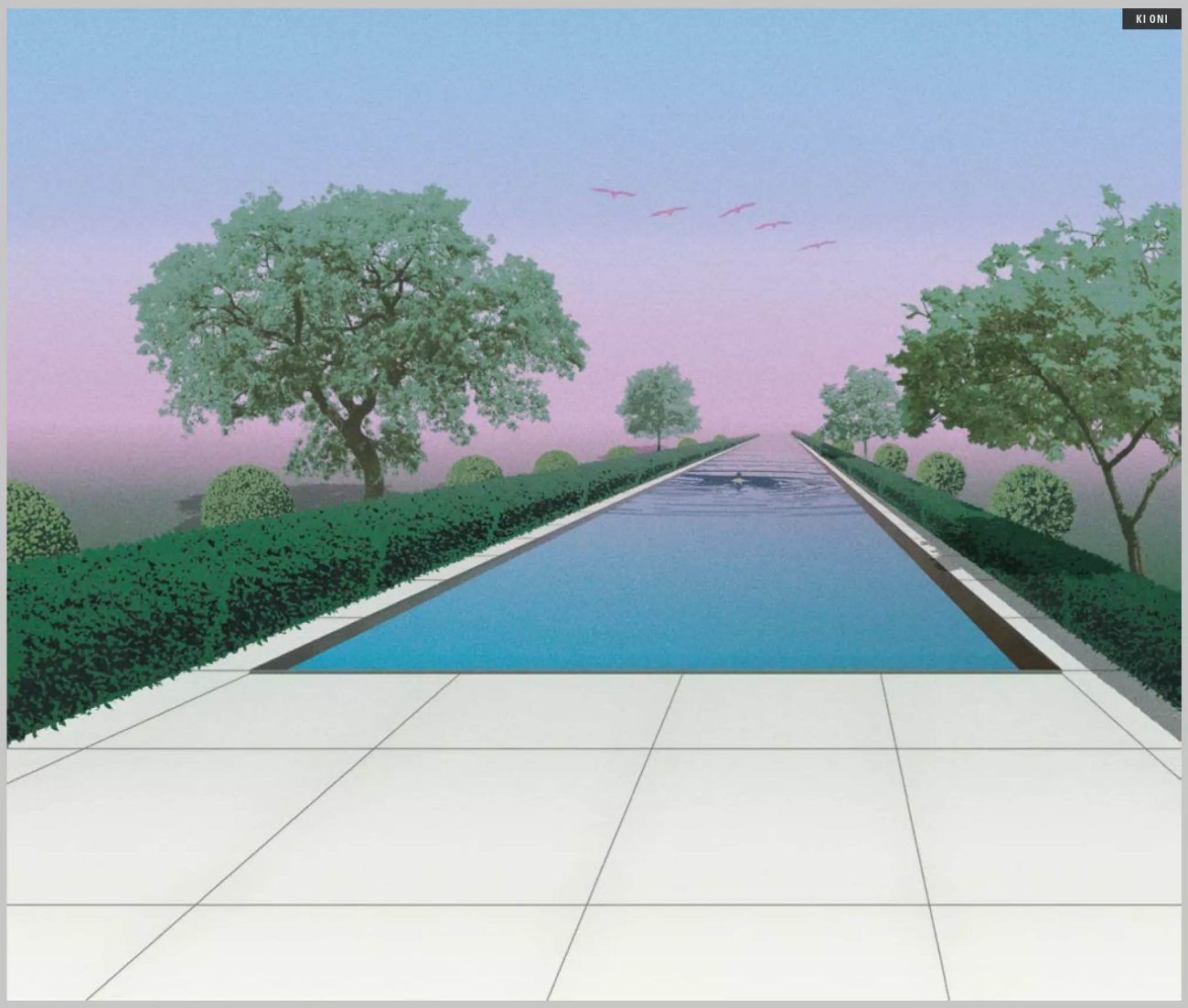
Known more for contemporary pastoral folk, this is Will Samson's first full-length ambient album. Recorded in Almada, Portugal, where the British musician now lives, 'Harp Swells' stretches period instrumental and technological elements – a bamboo flute, a 1970s portable tape recorder called a UHER 4200 – into pieces filled with wide-eyed wonder. Vocals only appear on the relatively brief, but central 'And Yet', providing a strong emotional undercurrent. Stitched together into a whole with six movements, there's a brightness here that's extremely appealing. **TI**

## GROSS MOTOR
**Gross Motor**
BANDCAMP

The debut album from Norfolk producer Gross Motor is thrillingly chaotic, much like the feeling of drinking way too much coffee. Built from abstracted, splintered beats, distortion and unpredictable switches in direction, the 10 short tracks here are dominated by intense and malevolent levels of nervous energy. 'Project Restart' steals the show for its framework of wonky electro snares, springy jackhammer bass tones and noisy distortion. A wild ride to the grossest fringes of rhythm. **MS**

## PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING / BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA / JULES BUCKLEY
**This New Noise**
TEST CARD

This celebration of the Beeb's centenary is a love fest from which it's wise to first detach your inner cynic. The music is rich and warm, the orchestra dovetailing perfectly with PSB and their samples. You might raise an eyebrow at 'An Unusual Man', a tribute to the BBC's first Director General (and fascist sympathiser) John Reith, but it's hard not to be swept away by the emotion as a guesting Seth Lakeman sings of the 20th century miracle of radio communication in 'A Cello Sings In Daventry'. **WS**


KI ONI

## KI ONI
**A Leisurely Swim To Everlasting Life**
AKP

The spiritual questions posed by the death of a loved one have rarely sounded as hopeful as Los Angeles artist Chuck Soo-Hoo's ambient compositions do here. Created after losing his grandmother, these languorous meditations have a warmth and buoyancy that betray the heavy layering of sounds Soo-Hoo builds from synth swells and field recordings of everyday hustle and bustle. The closing track, 'To Wander Beyond The Aquatic Center', is in constant slow ascendance and, like the record's cover art, could have no fixed endpoint, instead glitching out in its last seconds. **TI**

## IAN ELMS
**Good Night**
DARK ENTRIES

Not all electronic music from 1982 was high-gloss chart pop. Take this reissued cult classic – just the sort of DIY lo-fi that, at the time, would have only been heard on the outer limits of the John Peel show. Featuring Elms' Polymoog, drum samples and his own deadpan vocals, these 15 short pieces have titles such as 'Surrounded By Trees' and 'Running In The Dark', which hint at a narrative of some sort. The music is claustrophobic, unsettling and remains with you long after it departs. Recommended. **WS**

## A PRODUCE
**Land Of A Thousand Trances**
INDEPENDENT PROJECT

"As driving as the sound of world beat rhythms against modern-day electronics… or as subtle as the tinkling of Japanese bells mixed with background environmental sounds." So said the late Barry Craig, the LA musician and producer known as A Produce, of his self-described "trance" music. On his 1994 album, 'Land Of A Thousand Trances', his mastery of contrasts is demonstrated by the transcendent title track, and is evident throughout this faultless, expanded 18-track reissue. Further proof indeed that A Produce's sweeping soundscapes deserve an elevated place in the ambient music canon. **CF**

## SEB WILDBLOOD
**Separation Anxiety**
ALL MY THOUGHTS

Moving through similar waters to Overmono and Bicep, London producer Seb Wildblood's fourth album brings together visceral yet skittering beats with ethereal, ghostly ambience. The effect is a gently powerful energy evoking the feeling of joyful solitude in a crowded room. Take 'Don't See This', which melts distant, echoed voices over subtle basslines, nervous grooves and arpeggiated synth layers, or 'Handshake' which adds transcendental sax to the mix. Alone but connected, isolated but engaged – it's his best album yet. **MJ**

CARLOS NIÑO & FRIENDS

## CARLOS NIÑO & FRIENDS

**(I'm Just) Chillin', On Fire**

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

LA percussionist and producer Carlos Niño's sprawling collections of ambient jazz cuts require him to herd talent like a shamanic sheepdog. There are some big names to handle – band leader Kamasi Washington, new age pioneer Laraaji and Alice Coltrane acolyte Surya Botofasina among them. André 3000 even shows up with his flute. They all manage to cohere into an ecstatic communal outpouring, and when Niño allows analogue elements their moment above the undulating electronics, as he does on 'Woo, Acknowledgement' with sax, harp and voice, the compositions achieve true transcendence. **TI**

## RRUCCULLA

**Zeru Freq**

LAPSUS

Her 2018 LP 'SHuSH' was inspired by aquariums, and now Basque producer and percussionist RRUCCULLA unveils a new album designed as the soundtrack to an open-air museum. 'Zeru Freq' still feels like a living breathing organism, however, comprised of astonishingly fluid synth sounds that wriggle over sporadic beats hovering between loose jazz rhythms and full-blown drum 'n' bass. 'Pure Air Contortion' and '1 Tsp Breeze' are among the most exotic exhibits in this alluring cabinet of curiosities. **PC**

## LATHE OF HEAVEN

**Bound By Naked Skies**

SACRED BONES

This compelling NYC four-piece genuflect to the British icons of late 1970s and early 80s punk and new wave in an electrifying, fully formed debut that's laden with edgy underground promise. Looking across the Atlantic to the heady days of PiL, Killing Joke, Bauhaus, and Siouxsie And The Banshees for inspiration, the swirling, analogue synth-led standout, 'Ekpyrosis', is an absolute blast. Similarly, the drum machine-gunned 'Genome' and the potent shot of sonic adrenaline that is 'Ilusión De Luces (Cold's Embrace)' will have you partying like it's 1979. Superb. **CG**

## SIMON McCORRY

**I The Storm**

SEE BLUE AUDIO

This is four beatless, cello-led instrumentals, on which McCorry uses delay and loop effects so that the cellos weave and dance around each other, creating a mesh of sound that's sombre, but utterly mesmerising. The two longer tracks – 'The Earth's Sorry For All Things That Pass' and 'The Ever-Evolving Reflecting Mirror' – reach trance-inducing apogees, the latter building to an overpoweringly discordant finale. McCorry is carving a unique space for himself in UK experimental music and 'I The Storm' is further proof of a singular talent. **WS**

HÉCTOR OAKS

## HÉCTOR OAKS
**Fuego Universal**
KAOS

You don't really go to hear a Héctor Oaks DJ set expecting three-minute singalongs. Still, that's what the Berlin-based Spaniard has gone for on his second album, eschewing the solid loopy techno he usually spins in favour of vocal collaborations targeted squarely at superclubs. Some parts aim for punky kuduro banger ('Carretera'), other bits poppy Ibiza anthem ('Give Us The Night'), but ultimately far too much of 'Fuego Universal' lands too close to a Tiesto album for comfort. **PC**

## ALAN PALOMO
**World Of Hassle**
TRANSGRESSIVE

When Mexican artist Alan Palomo talk-sings the opening line, "I was lost in the mall / A little brown boy led astray" on his first record under his given name (rather than his more recognisable alias Neon Indian), it points towards a more personal kind of storytelling. But what follows are obfuscating tales filled with imagined characters painted in sun-dappled electropop pastels. These elements retain their shine on early tracks like 'La Madrileña', but the palette that he employs throughout 'World Of Hassle' could have benefitted from a little more colourful variety. **TI**

## SIEMA ZIEMIA
**Second**
BYRD OUT

Polish quartet Siema Ziemia combine subterranean electronic music with free jazz improvisation. Heard at their best on the tech-driven sax gymnastics of 'We Used To Cry', they create a brilliant fusion between the systematic nature of technology and the unexpected disruptions of humanity. Elsewhere, 'Atlant' builds through synth washes and pulsing bass towards a tenor sax climax that constantly teeters on the edge of elation. An album of transcendental yet earthbound freeform joy. Breathtaking. **MJ**

## ULVO
**Monstera Country Cyborg**
BANDCAMP

Somewhat incredibly, this is the fifth album from young Sheffield talent Ulvo, who makes a characteristically gritty, tactile version of glitchy electronica. Here, he aims to expose the unsettling unease hiding within the all-too-familiar. 'TV On Mute To Light The Saloon' pits a brittle, splintered banjo riff against distressed vocals and a melancholic synth motif. 'Honeypot' coasts along on gentle funkiness, with added violin-scraping edginess. Apparently, most of the percussion was created by dropping keys on the floor. Multi-layered and impeccably detailed, this is the business. **BW**

## CIRCUS UNDERWATER

**Circus Underwater**

SOUNDWAY

Circus Underwater was the collective name of Richard Sales and Jay Yarnall, Maryland natives who met at school in the late 1950s and later found common musical ground in artists ranging from The Band to Ornette Coleman. In 1984 the duo released their first and only LP, which is now being reissued by esteemed British label Soundway.

Although often defined as "pre-ambient", in reality 'Circus Underwater' flits and trips between genres like nobody's business, fearlessly incorporating elements of prog, experimental rock and psychedelic music into tracks with such psychotropic titles as 'I Wash My Hair With Limes' and 'Trees Walk'.

There are some bonus tracks included on this reissue too, although the original album – made all the more extraordinary by the fact Yarnall was virtually quadriplegic at the time of its recording – holds up perfectly well on its own. Not only does it capture the musical bond between the two "blood brothers" that made it, it also reflects on their experiences during those heady days of the 1960s and 1970s when love was free, hair was long, and music was everything. **IB**

## VIKEN ARMAN

**Alone Together**

DENATURE/!K7

Viken Arman is not a man to be rushed. The French-Armenian producer has hitherto released five EPs and now, a decade into his career as a recording artist, he's decided it's time for his first long-player.

'Alone Together' has certainly been worth the wait, with nine extended tracks built from sweet samples and tactile beats that swing with the sophistication of his home city of Paris. These are songs largely built for the dancefloor, with the nine-minute title track at the denouement taking a gentler tack as the night gradually winds down.

The lead song from the album, 'Lonely Raver', exemplifies the artistic evolution that has taken place. It's a delectable melange of minimal jazz, house and hip hop, with a trace of old Armenian records perceptible somewhere in the sonic slipstream. Arman was inspired to make it after finding himself lost in reverie on a Berlin dancefloor. Looking up, he suddenly noticed that he was dancing alone, hence the name. Impressive stuff. **JA**

## THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

**For That Beautiful Feeling**

EMI

As DJs first and producers second, The Chemical Brothers' sound has always been both a moveable, ever-evolving feast and a cumulative, expanding mixture of styles rather than anything that can be stripped down to its core. So, while Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands may have travelled a long way from the power breakbeat usage of their early years, they continue to surprise and innovate.

These days they tend to play to big festival crowds, and the needs of those audiences shape 'For That Beautiful Feeling', which wields a big, brash noise that's more about rollercoaster adrenaline rushes than delicate touches.

They have, however, perfected an approach that absorbs all around it from house and techno to breaks and electro, meaning the likes of 'No Reason', with its Daft Punk bass welded to Plastikman snare frenzy, feels entirely natural. There's always room for a big-name rock vocalist too – in this case Beck doing a vulnerable falsetto on the frazzled spiritual house of 'Skipping Like A Stone'. Best of all is probably the full-on disco wig-out 'The Darkness That You Fear' – the sound of The Chemical Brothers on top form. **BW**

CONRAD SCHNITZLER

## CONRAD SCHNITZLER
**Rot**
BUREAU B

This reissue of legendary Tangerine Dream and Kluster member Conrad Schnitzler's debut album marks its 50th, and very timely, anniversary. Timely, because it shines a light on how expansive and adventurous electronic music was, just as it was migrating to the heart of the mainstream.

The two long tracks here are both, like Schnitzler himself, thoroughly nonconformist. Inspired more by the post-Fluxus action art of Joseph Beuys than any sort of musical rulebook, both pieces exist in their own, undefinable soundworld. 'Meditation' isn't some sort of contemplative new age affair, but a hot mess of hisses, drones and constantly evolving pings that woke all of my cats from their slumbers. Meanwhile, the comparatively playful 'Krautrock' has a wonky swagger thanks to a resolutely unswerving micro-rhythm. Sounds flutter in, spiral around randomly and are then replaced almost as quickly. If you strain, you can hear electronic pop off in the distance – up close and personal, 'Rot' is synth expressiveness delivered with complete freedom. **MS**

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
**Arise – A Cold Spring Sampler**
COLD SPRING

The latest instalment in Cold Spring's sampler series is restricted to a strictly not-that-limited run of 4,000 copies, at a time when many labels consider half that to be a big seller. They have the big names to pull it off, for sure – Coil doing their eerie post-nuclear warped folk thing on 'Ostia (The Death Of Pasolini)', the ghostly choirs of 'Imagining October III' by Genesis P-Orridge and Soft Cell's Dave Ball, and Merzbow with their machine gun brutalist noisefest, 'No Cages Part 3', for starters.

But just as there's actually a lot more to Cold Spring than industrial music, there's plenty else on offer. Lull's 'Range (Excerpt)' is yearning, delicate, blissed-out ambience and totally compelling, MASCHINENZIMMER 412's 'Ecaf Dloc' is a billowy bass blowout over crunchy slow-motion beats, and the contributions by Tunnels Of Āh and Sleep Research Facility are impossibly tense, soundtrack-like affairs. All in all, it's a stylish baptism of fire for the curious. **BW**

## POLYPORES
**Multizonal Mindscramble**
DiN

The work of Preston's Stephen James Buckley – aka Polypores – exudes a kind of cellular earthiness, with protean synth concoctions churning like the fungal spores after which his musical persona is named. Besides sounding like the title of a Japanese game show, his new album, 'Multizonal Mindscramble', also pushes this protozoic aesthetic to new places.

It opens with 'The Dream Incubator', an unravelling analogue whorl whose chlorophyllic greens and wide-sky blues recall Mort Garson or Suzanne Ciani, before things begin to shift sideways. 'Vayse', meanwhile, ventures into avenues of high-strangeness, punctuated with a Polypores soundtrack.

His work has always bubbled on the edges of the arcane, and while 'Multizonal Mindscramble' does not fully pull the cosmic trigger on such weirdness, it's definitely looking down the barrel. 'Hyperdata' prickles with uncanny energy which blooms into the new age revelatory radiance of 'Compute Gnosis', the highlight from a musician whose horizons stretch beyond the gear table and into more esoteric territory. **ST**

## TAROTPLANE

**Murmuration**

NPM

Where other teenagers were practising 'Smoke On The Water' and pretending to be Slash in the mirror, you picture PJ Dorsey trying to play 'Amboss' on the guitar in his bedroom while wishing he was Robert Fripp.

But as the Baltimore musician's career has progressed, it feels like he's playing more air than air guitar. Early Tarotplane albums like 'Lysergic Forgeries' had him dousing loops sampled from krautrock acts like Popul Vuh in feedback. But on his recent collaborations with Polypores and Field Lines Cartographer his guitar is a more subdued background texture, and it has almost completely evaporated on 'Murmuration', where it drifts imperceptibly amid vaporous synths and zephyrs of flute.

It makes most sense to consider these five tracks as one 25-minute suite that – like the flocks of birds alluded to in the album title – twists and reconfigures into graceful shapes, before taking a more sinister turn on the closing track, 'Kappo And Sender', which feels more like a murder of crows descending. **PC**

## AUDIO OBSCURA

**Inside The Tettrix Wave Accumulator Downloading Full Spectrum Melodies**

BANDCAMP

This surprise new release from Neil Stringfellow's Audio Obscura is so stylistically restless that it comes across like someone with no self-awareness flicking through TikTok clips on a train (without headphones, obviously). Wonderfully energetic and unpredictable, one moment it's fractured electronica, then spacey ambient dreaminess, then symphonic techno, then Laurel Canyon folk rock.

'The Bending Of Space And Time' is a case in point. Here, Stringfellow starts with deep, euphoric house and dreamy vocals from Nick Worrall. Suddenly, the track breaks down into what could be Leopold Stokowski's orchestra tuning up at the beginning of the similarly expansive and adventurous 'Fantasia', finally imploding (after another housey detour) into musty 78 rpm opera voices and tinkly jazz piano. 'Move Slowly And Contemplate Things' is titled like either an Oblique Strategy card or an instruction from a guided meditation video. Whatever the source, this is Stringfellow at his most reflective and gentle – the calm centre of the electronic storms raging elsewhere on this fantastically diverse collection. **MS**

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

**The NID Tapes: Electronic Music From India 1969-1972**

THE STATE51 CONSPIRACY

The composer and pianist David Tudor was a friend and contemporary of John Cage, the latter having created 'Music Of Changes' for him to perform. In 1969, Tudor set up tape machines and a Moog synthesiser at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, effectively creating India's first electronic music studio. This collection gathers together a series of previously unheard recordings from that period, discovered in the NID archive by British musician Paul Purgas.

Rather than emulating their Western peers, these pieces reveal a group of artists striving to find their own authentic mode of experimentalism. Alongside contributions from musicians such as Jinraj Joshipura and IS Mathur, a snippet of Tudor's own work from the NID archive is also included. Though it's an interesting piece of magnetic rumble, 'Tape Feedback With Moog' is the least sizzling of the lot, lacking the urgency of Atul Desai's motorik tabla groove, 'Compositions', or the hypnotic pulse of SC Sharma's 'Dance Music II', a pair of highlights in a compilation that is a must-have for electronic music historians. **ST**

## DEENA ABDELWAHED

**Jbal Rrsas**

INFINÉ

### Sublimely powerful second album

Tunisian producer Deena Abdelwahed is certainly leading the charge when it comes to reshaping club-centric sounds. Her debut album, 2018's 'Khonnar', thoroughly stirred the dance music pot with an unflinching reimagination of bass, techno, and experimental music, which she blurred together and remade under her own banner.

Employing the polyrhythms, time signatures and musical tuning systems of her Arabic heritage, 'Khonnar' was a bold creative statement. It came as no surprise, though – even before the release of that album, she'd already racked up production credits for Fever Ray, with the track 'An Itch' from 2017's 'Plunge' LP. And since 'Khonnar', Abdelwahed has become a hotly in-demand DJ and producer, further cementing her name with a string of forward-thinking techno remixes.

Collaborating with like-minded individuals is a cornerstone of Abdelwahed's character, from the experimental 'Free Radicals' EP with Basile3, to scoring the critically acclaimed film 'Flagranti', which depicted the difficult and often cruel reality of queer existence in Tunisia.

Collaboration plays a major part in Abdelwahed's stirring second album too. She enlisted longtime friend and associate Khyam Allami, a renowned musicologist, software developer and musician, for "tuning advising" on 'Jbal Rrsas'. Allami is the programmer behind the innovative Apotome and Leimma tools, which allow users to explore transcultural tunings, and offer an antidote to the inherent biases of traditional Western musical production systems.

The music composition and production is all Abdelwahed's own though, and it's an electrifying brew. There's slamming percussion stacked into bewildering rhythms ('Six As Oil'), and lurching synths tweaked away from the notes you'll find on a piano ('The Key To The Exit' ). The album feels urgent, insistent, and constantly alive with its own energy.

There's also Abdelwahed's enigmatic voice, singing in Arabic. You don't need to understand the language in order to feel and divine her meaning – just look to the song titles and the stern sincerity of her vocals.

'Violence For Free' delivers its message directly, staccato synth plucks suddenly leaping into hardcore rave constructions amid a drum playground dedicated to the dancefloor. 'Naive' takes the steady start of a solitary synth, and folds it into a driving low-tempo haymaker, rife with distortion. Across the board, 'Jbal Rrsas' features all of Abdelwahed's trademark flavours, distilled into her most exciting blend yet.

FREDDIE HUDSON

# Shop Talk

**PJ Dorsey**, aka Tarotplane, talks us through his record collection

**Tell us a bit about your favourite record store?**

"Unfortunately, my favourite record store scaled back during Covid – that was Seance Centre in Toronto. In Baltimore, where I live, we don't have many shops that sell newer European and American electronic music, so I used to mail-order from them. They also scored a lot of amazing rare older backstock.

"My favourite record I purchased from them – an album by Michel Banabila called 'Trespassing'– was on their in-house label. They still sell their label releases via mail order, for those interested. Brandon Hocura who runs it is one of the most knowledgeable music people I know."

**How do you discover new music?**

"Luckily, I have cultivated a group of friends over the years who I can ask, 'What's good?', and they come back with the best answers. Some are DJs, some run record labels, and a few own record shops. Twitter – I learn a lot there. I am also an avid internet radio listener and I have my own show on dublab.de, so I am finding out things by listening to other people's shows on Dublab and NTS. Books are another – 'Obscure Sound' by Chee Shimuzu turned me onto loads."

**Have you ever bought a record based on the cover art alone?**

"I'm in my mid-50s, so that was one of the main ways a lot of my generation learned about music. My love of Pink Floyd came from seeing the covers before hearing the music. Same goes with Joy Division, and a lot of the Factory label output.

"I'm fairly obsessed with cover art and graphic design, so that helps me become galvanised by a release. I collect 60s-era concert posters, from people like Hapshash & The Coloured Coat. That flamboyant hippie style always appealed to me."

**What's one hard-to-find album you'd love to get your hands on?**

"I have owned a lot of my 'holy grails'. I stopped hardcore collecting years ago because I sold my collection to start a record shop.

"Two albums I wish I still had are Anna Själv Tredje's 'Tussilago Fánfara', which has the coolest cover and hasn't been – and likely won't be – reissued. It's one of the greatest kosmische records of all time, I think. The other is Throbbing Gristle's '24 Hours' tape box. Should have kept that one."

**Finally, tell us about your record collection**

"I don't have a massive physical collection, but I do have a gigantic digital one. My vinyl collection has around 300 albums. I try to only purchase albums I want to sit back and listen to the whole way through. My listening is mostly on the go as I have a long commute, so they need to be special. Lots of krautrock faves, plus Brian Eno and Terry Riley. My cherished record is Pink Floyd's 'A Saucerful Of Secrets' that my dad bought for me on import when I was 10."

**Tartoplane's 'Murmuration' is out now on NPM**

# Buried Treasure

## NICK NICELY

**Psychotropia**

TENTH PLANET, 2003

Born on a transatlantic flight layover in 1959, from the moment he took his first breath there was always going to be something a little different about Nick Nicely.

Labelled "the pop star that never was" by FACT magazine, Nicely proffered an inimitable brand of electro-psychedelia that fused classical music, eclectic psych-folk and the dark, angular electronics of acts like Tubeway Army and pre-'Dare' Human League, while his mind-bending 1982 single, 'Hilly Fields', influenced artists ranging from Soft Machine's Robert Wyatt to XTC's Andy Partridge.

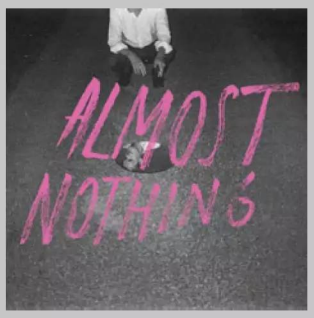
But it wasn't all freaky fun and games for Nicely, oh no. Despite the critical acclaim for 'Hilly Fields', the single made little headway (none at all, in fact) in the charts, and after he blocked the release of follow-up single 'On The Coast', Nicely was dropped by his then-label, EMI. With little equipment at his disposal and even less financial backing, he packed away his copies of 'Replicas' and 'Reproduction' and retreated from the music industry almost entirely for a number of years.

This would be a rather boring story if it ended there though. Having enjoyed commercial success as a house producer throughout the 1990s, by 2003 Nicely was putting out music under his own name again, allowing psychedelic reissue boffin David Wells to put out an album that compiled his earlier solo material along with various unreleased tracks.

Titled 'Psychotropia', it's one of the few albums for which the word "phantasmagorical" might actually be appropriate – from the trippy garishness of the artwork to the kaleidoscopic majesty of tracks like '49 Cigars' (the Tubeway Army/'Magical Mystery Tour'-era Beatles collaboration that never happened). 'Heaven's Gate', which appears on the expanded CD reissues of 2004 and 2010, is a lush, melody-rich ballad that feels like rolling down a grassy knoll on a summer's day. Together with the sublime 'Hilly Fields', the whole album is like opening a tightly locked box and revelling in the rush of colours and textures that tumble out before your eyes.

In 1982, NME declared 'Hilly Fields' to be "the best psychedelic record made since the 60s". If you find yourself inclined to agree, then it's recommended that you check out 'Psychotropia' – which is probably one of the best psychedelic records ever made. Full stop.

**IMOGEN BEBB**




## ALMOST NOTHING

**Almost Nothing**

ASSAI

### Collaborative electronics – familiar and new

Almost Nothing is the latest project by Idlewild frontman Roddy Woomble. It finds him stretching beyond the indie-folk of the majority of his solo output and the electronic leanings of his 2021 album 'Lo! Soul', a record where "the biggest curveball is the bold new palette of undulating synths and electronic rhythms". With 'Almost Nothing', Woomble continues in a similar vein, though this time around he's embracing a genre-fluid approach to music production.

Initially conceived as a soundtrack to an imaginary film, 'Almost Nothing' actually emerged as both a 10-track record and an accompanying book that captures Woomble's creative process across 100 pages of diary entries, lyrics, poems and candid images.

Created in collaboration with four different producers – Andrew Wasylyk, Le Junk, Scott Paterson (Protection) and Luciano Rossi (Dama Scout), 'Almost Nothing' captures the strange sense of anemoia that currently dominates contemporary cultural, social and political discourse.

Here, this nostalgia for something that never previously existed is perhaps a side-effect of two things. Firstly, the merging of Woomble's instantly recognisable vocal and melodic approach, one that always helped Idlewild stand out from the crowd. And secondly, the more contemporary sounds of electropop which simultaneously evoke an earlier era of electronic music. Yet, nothing about this record could have existed before now.

Reaching beyond the limitations of instantly recognisable traces of performance biography is a tough trick to achieve. Telefís managed it beautifully, with Cathal Coughlan's familiar tones transporting them into invigoratingly new, but timeless, spaces – thanks partly to Jacknife Lee's production. 'Almost Nothing' is a magnificent attempt at pulling off the same trick.

The collision between contemporary dancefloor pop and anthemic indie melodies offers up a cathartic joy here, at its best on 'Anything Whatever' and 'Better You Belong'. Elsewhere, the magnetic 'I Know Where I'm Going' comes in like Beck and goes out like M83. However, as a whole, 'Almost Nothing' is a slightly blurry, push me/pull me experience between the refreshingly timeless (the title track, 'Returning Shadows') and the more tethered to type ('True Time', 'Made It To Fade').

The overall effect is an album that makes you yearn for that period in the 1990s and 2000s when all indie was electronica – a time, in fact, that never was.

**MARTIN JAMES**

AIDA AND NESA AZADIKHAH

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
**Intended Consequence**
APRANIK

Despite disappearing from the daily news headlines, the horrifying ordeal facing the majority of Iranian women has hardly lessened since the outpouring of anger and sadness that came in the wake of the death of Mahsa Amini. 'Intended Consequence' is the second compilation to come from AIDA and Nesa Azadikhah's Apranik label, following 'Woman Life Freedom', released at the start of this year.

This second album builds on the excellent foundations of the first, and features must-hear talent from a collection of all-Iranian female artists, with only the label owners appearing twice across the two compilations.

Unerringly brilliant, each track adds a new facet to the release. Abji Hypersun's 'Resist The God Trick' begins life as a minimal affair, then dunks you in the heaviest bassline you've heard in years, before finally emerging as a piece of tough, blow-your-head-off jungle. Another highlight is Emsho's deep and groovy techno cut 'Down Time', which will delight the 130 bpm crowd. Outstanding music from unfairly overlooked musicians, this one deserves your undivided attention. **FH**

## MELENAS
**Ahora**
TROUBLE IN MIND

Hailing from Pamplona in Spain – a famous pit stop on the Camino de Santiago – Melenas' music is perfect for the open road and 'Ahora' is guaranteed to get your feet moving. Starting life in 2016 as a melodic indie band not a million miles artistically from fellow countrywomen Hinds, Melenas approached their third album with a question – what would their psych rock, jangly pop sound like on synthesisers? If that seems like a kind of genre tourism, then they certainly don't sound like fly-by-night pilgrims on 'Ahora'.

Tracks such as 'Dos Pasajeros' and 'K2' have the feel of Stereolab or Electrelane, with an obvious nod to motorik innovators and originators like Neu! and Can, but with enough Spanish sass to give it an original twist. The closing number, '1,000 Canciones', luxuriates in electronic heaven where oscillations are as myriad as the angels – a sign perhaps of what may lie around the corner should Melenas continue to stay on this course? The road ahead looks inviting. **JA**

## PORTLAND VOWS
**The Witches Of Hopwas Woods (Circa 1984)**
THIRD KIND

In 1984, a group of witches were arrested at Hopwas Woods in Staffordshire, after they were caught dancing naked during a ceremony. Portland Vows' Bob Plant, living nearby at the time, went to visit the woods a few days later with some friends, and the recollection of the artefacts and remnants that they found formed the basis for 'The Witches Of Hopwas Woods'.

Recorded in 2020, using a modular set-up athis home studio in Aberdeen, these pieces are characterised by a sense of wonderment and dread. 'The Point Of Pain' is full of haunted sparseness, an unswerving outline of a ritualistic percussion rhythm underpinning droning synths and mysterious, ephemeral tones.

Elsewhere, 'Errors In Creation' stands out for its delicate, evasive central melody and flute-like sounds, while the bold, swooping synth sequences of 'One Hundred Years' carry a sense of wild motion. Plant's approach is one of evenhandedness, avoiding menacing horror soundscapes or folksy whimsy. Bewitching, ethereal and ever-so-slightly spooky. **MS**

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

**Future Sounds Of Kraut Vol 1**

COMPOST

Compiled by Compost artist Fred Und Luna, this scintillating international survey of the contemporary krautrock-inspired sonic landscape leads us to the places where seeds cast by the likes of Neu!, Harmonia and Kraftwerk found the most fertile ground. You might only be familiar with a handful of the artists featured here, such as Kosmischer Läufer, Pyrolator or Listening Center, but rest assured, though all of them are motorik or kosmische at heart, none of them comes across as derivative or slavish.

Even the most obvious nod to Düsseldorf's man-machine, Gilgamesh Mata Hari Duo's 'Florian Schneider-Esleben', is a beautifully executed utopian homage, as is 'Hymne Der Melancholischen Programmierer', Sankt Otten's soaring Berlin School-informed track.

Amon Düül II and Popol Vuh-obsessed Jean-Emmanuel Krieger, aka Baikonour, delivers a real standout via his vintage synths and compressors in the form of the cyclical chugger 'Oben Beg (Mk2)', while elsewhere Sao Paulo artist Abrão serves up a bona fide dancefloor banger in the form of his technicoloured and vocoded 'Intensidade (Rina Remix)'. Krautstanding! **CG**

## MOUNT VERNON ARTS LAB

**Deltic Vespers**

CASTLES IN SPACE

He could stake a decent claim as the founding father of hauntology, but it's doubtful Drew Mulholland would welcome such pigeonholing. This amiable Glaswegian spent his 1970s youth making tape loops from dismantled cassettes, and by the 1990s had founded Mount Vernon Arts Lab, channelling his love of psychedelia and grungy garage-pop into a welter of hissy home recordings.

'Deltic Vespers', named after the railway breaker's yard behind his childhood home, gathers 19 of these early fragments into a wonderfully entertaining scrapbook. Some are barely snippets. 'Flames' is 47 seconds of delicious '96 Tears'-esque pounding on a Vox Continental, 'Hyperion Go Purple' a minute of twangy Ventures-style surf-rock.

But there are also hints of the uneasy experiments that would make his name. 'The Differential Equation' combines cabaret drums with scary radiophonic drones, and 'Automatic Frequency Control' is an uneasy hummadruz. Altogether, it's a fascinating snapshot of a thrillingly fertile moment. **BF**

## BLANKFOR.MS, JASON MORAN AND MARCUS GILMORE

**Refract**

RED HOOK

From within a patch of glitching climactic drone, 'Onset I' sets anxious and atonal piano into an upward tumble. It's like the edges and corners of well-known motifs boiled down to their constituent parts, evaporating in a shimmering conglomerate – a moment of Chopin's 'Funeral March' glistens before disappearing behind a fragment of Beethoven's 'Piano Sonata No 14'.

This oddness – the sense of something simultaneously familiar and yet completely alien – runs through 'Refract'. In this collaboration between Jason Moran, BlankFor.ms (aka Tyler Gilmore) and Marcus Gilmore, bursts of melancholic piano are spiked and denatured into weirder forms by electronics and percussion. Tracks such as 'Tape Loop C – II' and 'Inward, Curve' recall the broken jazz-hop of the Antipop Consortium's 2003 album 'Antipop Vs Matthew Shipp'. The push and pull between piano and electronics here, though, is far weightier and more dramatic, setting up a doomy wax and wane as keys tumble into spiralling disorder then subside into hushed serenity. **ST**

## SECTION 25

**Dark Light / Retrofit / Nature + Degree / Part-Primitiv**

FACTORY BENELUX

### Quartet of vinyl reissues

How do we judge musical "greatness"? Are the greatest artists those who have had extensive careers? Those who are particularly influential? Those who do things differently from everybody else?

Formed in Poulton-Le-Fylde in 1977 by brothers Larry and Vincent Cassidy, Factory band Section 25 tick all the above boxes, although the huge numbers of record sales that people so often use to determine an artist's quality proved more elusive. Like many other post-punk bands, they were initially dogged in their pursuit of rhythm-driven gloom. However, unlike most of their contemporaries, they later became an indie-dance crossover act with a penchant for lilting melodies and warm electronics.

It's a fusion of these two sounds that often inhabits Section 25's 21st century work, including albums 'Part-Primitiv' (2007), 'Nature + Degree' (2009), 'Retrofit' (2010) and 'Dark Light' (2013), all four of which have been remastered and released on limited-edition vinyl for the first time.

'Part-Primitiv' is the most intriguing of the four, with tracks like 'Winterland I', 'She's So Pretty' and 'Dream' exuding a bleak but comforting fragility that could only be achieved by a band from a far-flung corner of the north-west of England. 'Nature + Degree' boasts a similar underlying sense of desolation, but gives it a dance-infused edge. 'Dark Light' feels bittersweet when you hear its mournful lyrics ("How can we be found / If we never get lost?") and consider that it was released after the premature death of Larry Cassidy.

'Retrofit', meanwhile, is something of an outlier, comprising tracks from Section 25's back catalogue revisited in a brand-new way. There's much here to appeal to the hardcore fan, but for the casual listener it will likely be the 'Retrofit' version of the group's debut single 'Girls Don't Count' which strikes the most efficacious chord. Its application of the original lyrics over a euro-esque beat and accompanying female backing vocals home in on just how brightly Section 25's light shone, no matter what style they turned their hand to. The phrase 'Girls Don't Count' might have been tongue-in-cheek, but as these reissues prove, it can be declared with no irony whatsoever that Section 25 certainly do still count.

**IMOGEN BEBB**

# Label Profile

**Label:** Cold Spring
**Location:** Manchester, UK
**Est:** 1987

**Potted History:** "It's been so long… decades now, and hundreds of releases," explains Cold Spring founder Justin Mitchell. "Starting with a few tape releases in the 1980s, then vinyl and CDs from the 90s, and now all formats, including digital, on every platform.

"I'd wanted to run a label since I was at school, selling bootleg cassettes when I was 15. As for the name, it means everything and nothing. A piece of industrial machinery, an inclement season, a water source… I've been asked if it refers to research laboratories in the USA, and even William S Burroughs, whose material we have released."

**Mission Statement:** "If I like something, that means other people will! I get about 30 demos a week, and 99 per cent of them aren't right for the label. If you're going to submit a demo, have a look at the history and flavour of the label – who we've worked with in the past, look at the current roster to see who we're releasing and touring. It's weird, but there's never been a moment without the right release at the right time. We've been very lucky that way. The amount of times I've approached an artist who's responded, 'Wow, I was just thinking the same thing'. Long may that continue."

**Key Artists & Releases:** "That's a tricky one," says Mitchell. "All releases are given as much respect, hard work and publicity as the next. However, some have had larger audiences because of the legacy of the bands. For instance, our recent BEF 'Music For Stowaways', the Coil reissues we've been working on over the last decade, the Psychic TV 'Themes' boxset, 'Antichrist' – the Lars Von Trier soundtrack, Krzysztof Penderecki's 'Kosmogonia', Merzbow and Sun Ra, the three Penny Rimbaud / Crass albums and the MZ 412 'Vault' wooden boxset. The most highly regarded dark ambient release on the label would have to be Sleep Research Facility's 'Nostromo' from 2001."

**Future Plans:** "There's probably about 30 titles in the schedule right now. Some future releases include Psychic TV, Coil, Little Annie – aka Anxiety, Jack Dangers and Merzbow, Shane Embury, FM Einheit, The Telescopes, Satori, Lull, Khost, Burial Hex, MZ 412, Sleep Research Facility, Colossloth, Llyn Y Cwn, She Spread Sorrow, Sonologyst, Kollaps, Bill Laswell and Peter Namlook's six-CD box, plus some more great soundtracks."

**Any Other Business?** "Be prepared to work 24 hours a day, even when you're dreaming! The industry is very odd – it never stops, and so neither can you. I can never see myself retiring… when you do a job you love, with every day bringing a different challenge, you'll never be able to work at anything else, nor would you want to. Anyway, I've done this for so long that outside this industry, I'm now pretty much unemployable!"

**For more, visit coldspring.bandcamp.com**

# First And Last And Always

Pale Blue Eyes' **Matt Board** on the first and last albums he bought, and a go-to record

**FIRST**

## BLUR

**The Great Escape**

FOOD/VIRGIN, 1995

"I bought this off the back of the single 'The Universal'. It was pretty hard to compete with my dad's incredible LP collection. Dad introduced me to loads of music, like the Cocteaus, Stereolab, This Mortal Coil, The Cure... but Blur was one I discovered myself. I loved the ace pop song arrangements, but also I was learning the guitar and remember loving Graham Coxon's tones. This led to the beginning of a guitar pedal obsession…"

**LAST**

## KEEL HER

**With Kindness**

O GENESIS, 2019

"I'd been meaning to get this for a while. I always loved Rose's [Rose Keeler-Schaffeler, aka Keel Her] effortless topline melodies and the cruisey song arrangements. The production is top, great synth lines and oscillating organs, and I absolutely love the Univox drum machine as well. The album artwork is by Rose too – we've had it framed and put up in our new front room in Sheffield. 'No Control' and 'Complain Train' are highlights."

**ALWAYS**

## SIGUR RÓS

**Ágætis Byrjun**

SMEKKLEYSA, 1999

"This record started a total Sigur Rós obsession, to the point where I went on a pilgrimage to Iceland years ago and made it to their Sundlaugin studio to record some demos. I love the manipulated found sounds and dynamic arrangements, which take you on a journey through sweeping, dense guitar tones. 'Svefn-G-Englar' is probably my favourite song ever. I still listen to this most weeks. It's an album that has given me so much joy and often felt like a safe place to disappear."

## PALE BLUE EYES

**This House**

FULL TIME HOBBY

### Moving synthpop meditations on grief

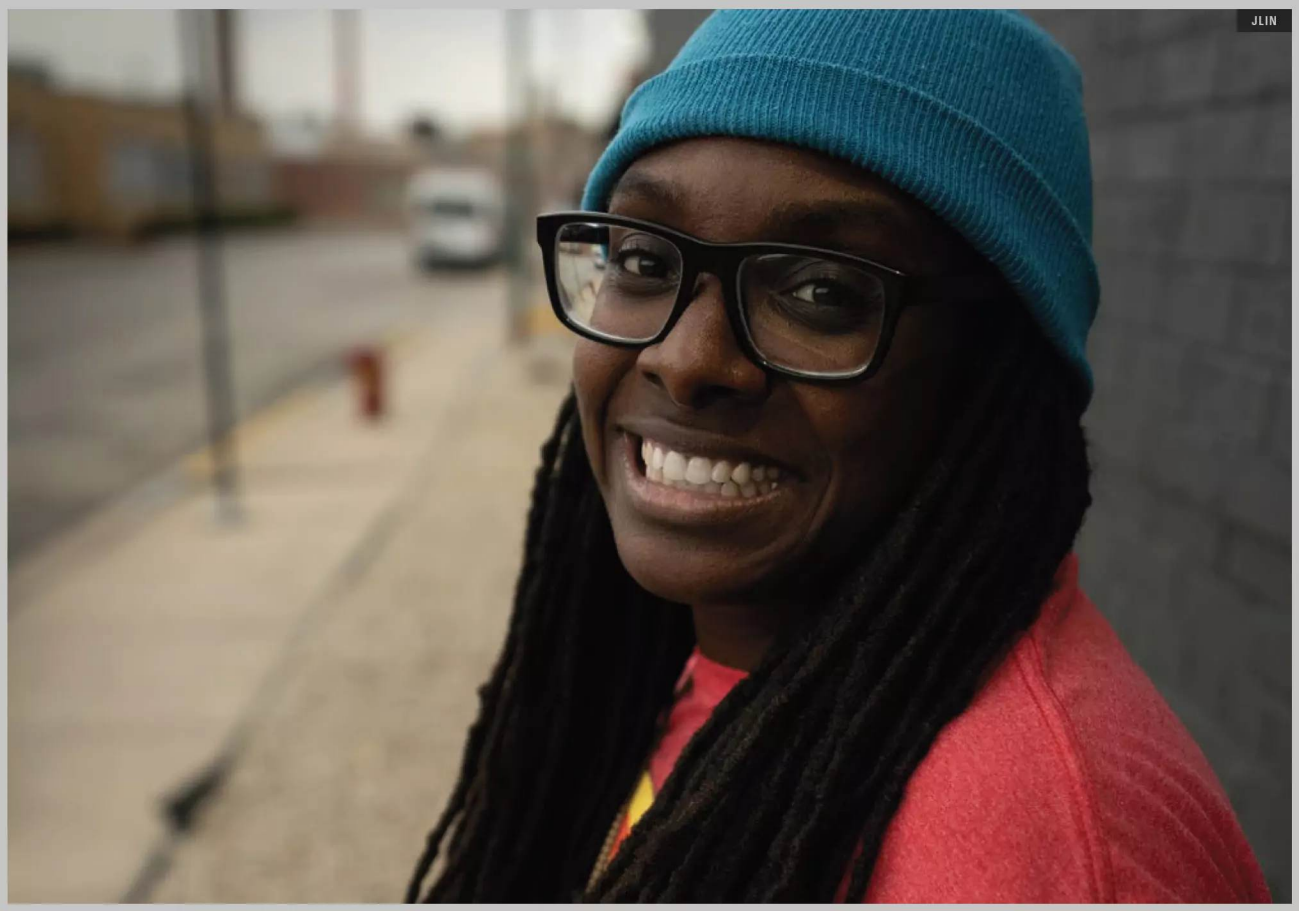
For a lucky few, the certainties of childhood seem reassuringly indestructible. It's Mum and Dad at home, isn't it? Still the *same* home, with your battered action figures hiding in the loft and your faded felt-tip drawings stuck to the fridge with a chipped Buzz Lightyear magnet. But maturity puts cracks in the illusion of permanence. Your parents grow old. They get ill. You don't go round for dinner, you go round to make *them* dinner. And then they're gone, leaving you with a silent house suddenly filled by the unwelcome ghosts of a time that now feels more bittersweet than idyllic.

Incredibly, here's an album that sensitively celebrates those feelings – and, of course, the joys that came before. The house in question is on the front cover. An unassuming Devonshire cottage, it was the childhood home of frontman Matt Board, who – fair to say – has had a torrid few years. Pale Blue Eyes' 2022 debut album 'Souvenirs' was a tribute to his late father, recorded in the garden of the house itself while Board and his wife Lucy (who's also his bandmate) consoled and cared for his ailing mother. Now she's gone too, the property has been sold, and 'This House' stands as a moving testament to them all.

The Boards have channelled their sadness into a crisply contemporary take on the vintage synthpop lineage of Lucy's native Sheffield. 'Simmering' and 'Hang Out' are filled with chiming Human League melodies, effortlessly evoking an age when the 'Top Of The Pops' studio was at least 75 per cent balloon. The melancholy is implicit, just a nagging doubt at the edge of the dancefloor – but it's there alright. "You're already gone," Matt sings on the vaguely New Order-ish 'Spaces'. "These feelings, they're temporary".

Third man Aubrey Simpson adds razor-sharp mod basslines, Lucy contributes the occasional plaintive trumpet. And, by the end, there's acceptance of sorts. "I look around the room and understand," Board sings, amid the Cocteau Twins guitars of closing track 'Underwater'. "I see so much of you still remains". It does – no longer in the echoes of an empty house, but rather in the grooves of a record that is both touching and triumphant. To infinity, and beyond.

**BOB FISCHER**


JLIN

## JLIN
**Perspective**
PLANET MU

Emerging from Chicago's footwork scene, Indiana-raised producer Jerrilynn Patton (aka Jlin) has skilfully avoided typecasting of genre or form since her 2011 breakout release 'Erotic Heat'. In that time, she has soundtracked Rick Owens' 2014 fashion show, scored the Company Wayne McGregor ballet 'AutoBIOgraphy', collaborated with choreographer Kyle Abraham and the AIM project, launched an online music course with Soundfly, and has been shortlisted for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her composition 'Perspective' which was performed by the American ensemble Third Coast Percussion.

This mini-album finds Jlin fusing Third Coast Percussion's organic rhythms with her trademark deconstructed footwork beats, disquieting sounds and edgy ambience. 'Obscure' offers a driving rush of skittering rhythms, 'Duality' and 'Dissonance' hint at Burundi, Balinese gamelan and Indian raga, while 'Paradigm' brings together a range of percussive styles to breathtaking effect. Superb. **MJ**

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
**ERR REC Library Vol 4**
**Sport & Physical Activity**
ERR REC

This choice French label and its elite team of Gallic electronicists urge us to don the lycra, scrunchie-back the perm and get physical with this latest in a superb series that celebrates all things modular, analogue and retro-futuristic. Taking a kitschier angle than we've generally come to expect from the library genre, vintage synths abound at every joyful thrust here, with a common, uptempo theme that will aid your roller-disco pirouettes no end.

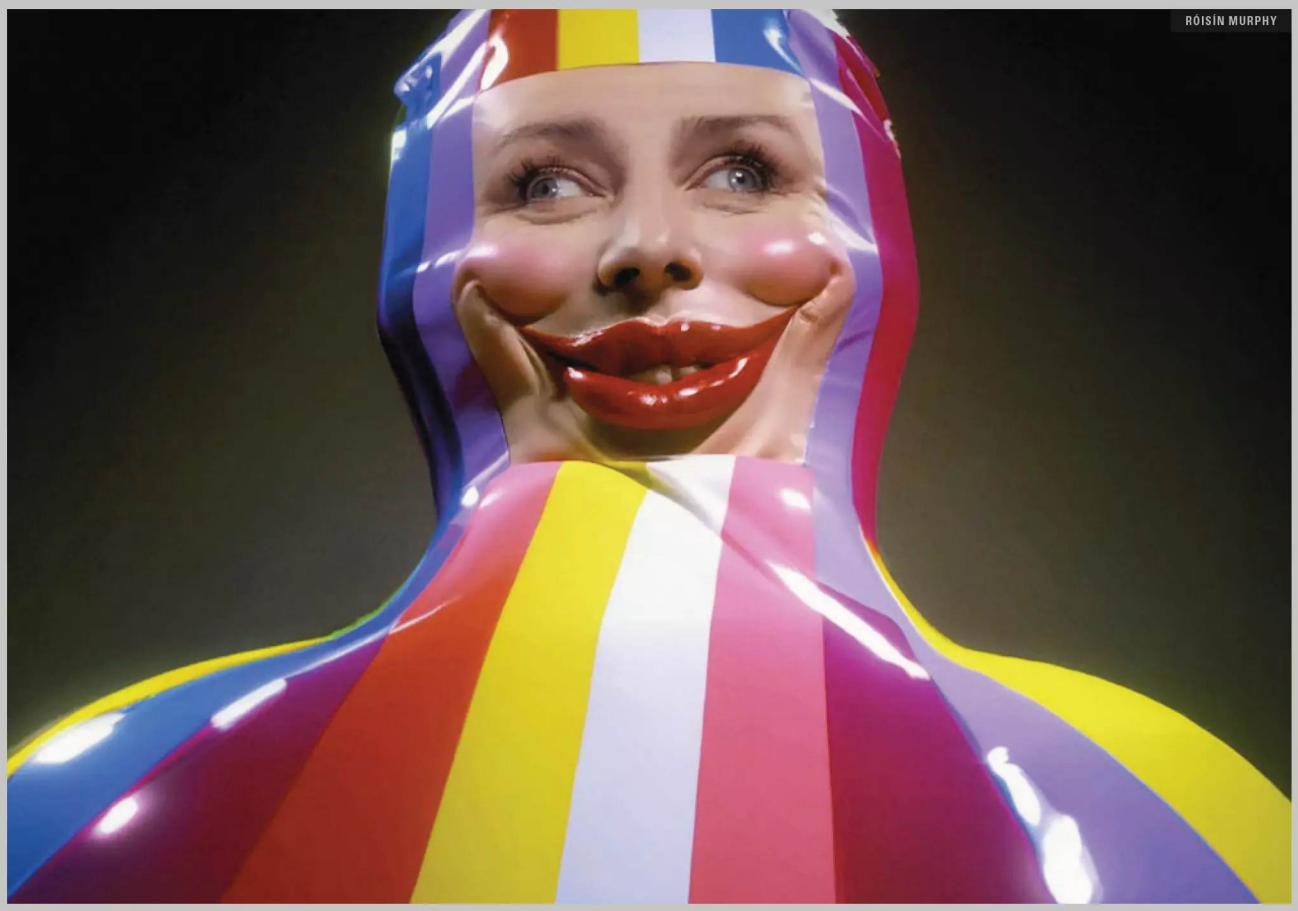
Tiger Tigre's 'À Deux Doigts De La Victoire' gets things going with an intoxicating cocktail of hands-in-the-air 1990s house and riveting 80s cop-chase synths, while Julien Radechi's 'Team Building' makes the most of the Emulator to funk it up, 80s disco-pop style.

Elsewhere, space is the place for La Guilde Asteroid's sci-fi drama 'Requiem Aerobic', though Alexis Lumière's frenetic drum-machined belter 'Sport Connexion' delivers on a whole other level. Surely running on illegal substances and even managing a nod to the chanting stadium crowd, it's all about the record-breaking percussive pace and motivational cowbells that push us through to its endorphin-rushing, triumphant, synthy gold medal peak. Champion! **CG**

## JOHN CAME
**Rhythmicon**
MUTE

For those who live for the long-lost gems of electronic experimentation, this enigmatic one-off from the Mute vaults will fully hit the spot. A concept album that linked the obscure Rhythmicon machine (co-developed in the late 1920s by Henry Cowell and Leon Theremin himself – allegedly), to the potential of emergent computer software technology to deliver data-derived harmonics. Originally released in 1995, it was shrouded in great mystery, amid red-herring rumours that John Came was an alias of either Vince Clarke or Mute founder Daniel Miller.

A deeply engaging work, it stood in contrast to the beat-centric club music most were listening to at the time, including that made by the actual artists behind the pseudonym – Mute's Fortran 5 and Komputer duo Simon Leonard and David Baker. Taking many of their knowing cues from 1970s Germany and its experimental underground rather than mid-90s UK rave, tracks like 'Root', and 'Ink Tank' especially, set the cerebral tone. Squelchy, familiar tropes of early techno subtly blend with cyclical waves of vocoder-embellished retro-futurism, creating a singular palette that devotees of Aphex Twin or Cluster alike will revel in. **CG**


RÓISÍN MURPHY

## RÓISÍN MURPHY
**Hit Parade**
NINJA TUNE

Ex-Moloko singer Róisín Murphy returns with 'Hit Parade', her sixth full-length solo offering to date. Produced by Hamburg musician DJ Koze, the album is, as Murphy herself declares, "exploding with colour". And yet, sometimes it is a little too colourful. With so many textures and production effects flying around on tracks like 'Fader' and 'You Knew', it can feel difficult to keep up.

When the highs do hit, they hit hard. The second single, 'The Universe', is one of the most accomplished tracks of Murphy's career, its purposefully ingenuous lyrics ("The multiverse is singing our song / What possibly could go wrong?") and easy, breezy guitars making for a deliciously unsettling slab of freaky, tropical-flavoured pop.

Existing Murphy fans will probably love 'Hit Parade', and despite its, at times, overly chaotic nature, it's an album that certainly seals her reputation as an artist who is unafraid to explore uncharted waters. **IB**

## REVBJELDE
**Amicus**

## HOWLROUND
**Trespass And Welfare**
BURIED TREASURE

Buried Treasure overlord Alan Gubby gives debut vinyl releases to two excellent 2022 albums, now rejigged. 'Amicus', by Gubby's own abrasively psychedelic outfit Revbjelde, is both a tribute to long-term friend and artist Jon Kemp, and a furious indictment of post-Brexit Britain. No prizes for guessing the target of the industrial 'Fukko The Clown' ("The big hook, the big lure / The false talk, the false cure"), with a pounding "rehash" by Zyklus among a trio of new remixes. See also Bernard Grancher's splendidly woozy synth version of 'Goose Chase'.

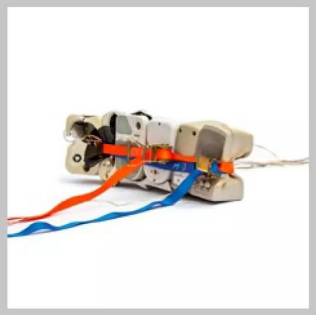
Howlround, meanwhile, is experienced tape tormentor Robin The Fog. And 'Trespass And Welfare' is the ultimate… well, howlround. No outside inputs, just two vintage tape machines creating loops of recursive noise. From the opener 'Sonicjob Horsfunk' onwards, it's a head-pounding trip with hints of haunting melody. 'A Bird In The Head' feels like the ghost of some ancient 78 attempting to squeak through a portal into 2023. Of four new additional tracks, the squelchy 'Far Life Cage Gunk' is an otherworldly highlight. **BF**

## APOSTILLE
**Prisoners Of Love And Hate**
NIGHT SCHOOL

Although there were teasing glimpses of Michael Kasparis' pop chops on his first two Apostille albums, the Glaswegian artist seemed a little too cynical and self-conscious to really show them off. However, 'Prisoners Of Love And Hate' sees him remove the post-punk raincoat to reveal some sequined hot pants, before heading down to a disco soundtracked more by Whigfield and Meat Loaf than Cabaret Voltaire.

You could call wannabe AOR anthem 'Natural Angel' or hi-NRG belter 'Saturday Night, Still Breathing' guilty pleasures, but Kasparis doesn't suffocate them with a blanket of irony. Instead he wraps you in the sort of raucous bonhomie you might get during a drunken karaoke rendition of N-Trance's 'Set You Free' – which is pretty much what closing track 'Feel Good (You Can Make Me)' sounds like.

It's not all big goofy grins though. The electropop ballad, 'Nothing But Perfect', and the tender indie guitar strum of 'People Make This City' are likely to have you crying into your pint at the end of the night. **PC**



## ONEOHTRIX POINT NEVER

**Again**

WARP

### Unique soundscapes fuse man and machine

Daniel Lopatin's quest to convey emotion with machines has entered a new phase. The Brooklyn experimental musician has embraced the current fascination with AI, using tools such as OpenAI's Jukebox to assist him in his artistic expression.

Shuffling sporadically through a series of moods has come to be expected from any Oneohtrix Point Never album, though 'Again' is not as distractible as its predecessor, 2020's 'Magic Oneohtrix Point Never', which was a loose concept record based on growing up in Boston and twisting the radio dial with all the bubblegum pop, static and surprises that might engender.

For his 10th studio album, Lopatin has attempted a more serious endeavour, and to prove the point, we sashay in on an ensemble of strings on 'Elseware'. What follows is a whole menagerie of sonic possibilities, but always with a semblance of cohesion, where orchestral elements rub up against post-rock to create something jaw-droppingly unique.

As usual, tracks appear and evolve seemingly as randomly as thoughts, though the changeability is more tempered and less skittish than one might have come to expect. Perhaps 'Again' reflects a maturing of vision as Lopatin has entered his 40s or, more likely, it's a reaction to his previous records.

If there's any resemblance to past endeavours, then there are cinematic gestures that might be redolent of his 'Uncut Gems' soundtrack from 2019. Like that movie, it's an interior cinema built for the small screen which occasionally feels claustrophobic. The expansive freedom of the title track gives way to the airless video game assault of 'World Outside', which has surely been named ironically.

That said, the use of AI could be regarded as something of a red herring, given how human it all sounds. There are contributions from ex-Sonic Youth musicians Lee Ranaldo and Jim O'Rourke, as well as vocals by Xiu Xiu and Lopatin himself. 'Again' is mechanistic, yes, but also beautiful, like on 'Krumville' or 'Ubiquity Road', which both envisage a sentient future where man and machine come together in perfect alignment. Such utopianism is unlikely, but the incomparable craftsmanship that Lopatin once again brings to the table is a thing of wonder in itself.

JEREMY ALLEN

## LORAINE JAMES

**Gentle Confrontation**

HYPERDUB

### A new chapter with formative sounds

Loraine James says her new album is the record her teenage self would like to have made. It's certainly very different from the music the London producer did actually make in her teens, even if the deliquescent melodies and restless rhythms of the EPs James released just before turning 20 in 2015 already offered early signs of her preternatural talent. That ability has since earned her considerably wider attention thanks to her second album, 2019's 'For You And I', and especially following last year's 'Building Something Beautiful For Me' and the self-titled release under her Whatever The Weather alias.

'Gentle Confrontation' represents an even greater leap forward from those records, the distance made clear on 'Glitch The System (Glitch Bitch 2)', a sequel/reprise of 'For You And I' track 'Glitch Blitch'. But where that felt nervy and unsettling, this time James seems more relaxed, the tense beats now overlaid with almost soothing harp-like sounds.

Her confidence is apparent from the opening title track, with sonorous classical strings suggesting James is still drawing on the inspiration of Julius Eastman – the overlooked Black American composer whose works she reinterpreted on 'Building Something Beautiful For Me'.

'Gentle Confrontation' climaxes with frenetic beats, and while the album isn't short of James' trademark rhythmic tricks – see the complex math-rock of the wryly titled 'I DM U' or the skittering 'While They Were Singing' – they're just one thread in a sumptuous sonic tapestry of warm synths, angelic R&B samples and the susurrant vocals of collaborators like KeiyaA and RiTchie.

Opening up about her experiences as a Black queer woman on past records, James has always been even more fearless in her lyrics than her production, and two tracks she gives her own voice to here – '2003' and 'Cards With The Grandparents' – address the death of her father and her grandfather's dementia with uncompromising honesty.

Eight years after her first releases, it's only her formative influences and namesake, Richard D James, who can really claim to have assembled such a unique body of music at such a tender age. One crucial difference being that Loraine James isn't part of an electronic music scene full of people that look like her. The soft-focus sheen of 'Gentle Confrontation' means it might not immediately feel like a rallying cry, but it's without doubt a work of both tenderness and inspiration.

PAUL CLARKE

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
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CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
FREDDIE HUDSON,
TONY INGLIS,
MARTIN JAMES,
PUSH,
WILL SIMPSON,
MAT SMITH,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

**Michael Kasparis**, aka Apostille, takes on our round of quick-fire questions

**INTERVIEW: NEIL MASON**

**Hello Michael, where are you right now and what can you see?**
"I'm in an office staring at a signed poster for Dorothy Max Prior's readings from '69 Exhibition Road'. I highly recommend that book."

**It's always a good day when there's a new Apostille album – are you pleased with how 'Prisoners Of Love And Hate' has turned out?**
"I am, yeah. I can pick holes in it, but my attitude is to say, 'Well, that's what I could do then' and to move on. I didn't listen to it for a few months after getting the masters back, then one of the songs came up on my phone, and I was like, 'Wow, this is great, what is it!?'. So overall, yeah, mission accomplished."

**It's a dramatic album title**
"Well, I love a bit of drama. During lockdown, I was contacted by a cousin I didn't know I had. He'd been at a mutual relative's and found out he had a cousin who worked round the corner from his tattoo parlour. As a way of getting to know each other, I got a tattoo from him. He'd done a drawing in tribute to the Teen Angel fanzine of a Prisoners Of Love tattoo, which is a classic design."

**And that ties in with the album how?**
"I liked the title anyway, but I've gotten into transcendental meditation, and have been thinking about thoughts and emotions being something that you can observe separate from 'the self'. That led me to realise all my songs are about being beholden, imprisoned by our desires and their consequences. So it seemed like a great analogy for what the songs on the record are about."

**It's been a while since your last album, 'Choose Life', in 2018. What kept you?**
"I chose life! I went through a lot in the four years between 'Choose Life' and 'Prisoners'. I was in a popular band that broke up, personal tumult, the pandemic, you know – *life*. I actually write songs really quickly and fairly effortlessly, it's all the other stuff that takes time."

**You also run the Night School label, so what's the news from there?**
"It's definitely been slower this year, there just doesn't seem to be enough time, and I'll never be able to pay my rent with it, so I can't dedicate as much time as I'd like. Having said that, I have six releases in the pipeline, including a compilation of failed, obscure 80s synthpop, which is going to be a lot of fun for people to comb through."

**Back to the new album. There's a *lot* going on – 70s power pop, 80s synthpop, 90s house, 2000s trance... could you not find anything you liked from the 1960s?**
"I had to stop somewhere [laughs]. I would love to have got some early 60s free jazz on there, but sadly I don't have the chops. Maybe the next record will be full of baroque layered harmonies like The Beach Boys, who knows."

**I love that you say the record harnesses "melodrama in the vein of Meat Loaf and Springsteen". It does! That Meat Loaf/ Springsteen/electronic pop crossover is long overdue, right?**
"Right! I feel like I'm here to fill that gap. It might be a Marmite concept, but you don't want to make something *everybody* likes. I feel if people get this record then they're in my club, you know?"

**Where does your love of overblown MOR/ AOR come from?**
"When I was nine or 10, 'I'd Do Anything For Love' was Number One for 12 weeks, or something, and I was obsessed with it. I'd sit by the radio with a pen and paper and try to write all the lyrics down. I had a cassette recorder, I just didn't think to tape the bloody thing [laughs]. Even though they played it every hour it still took me about six hours!"

**You also namecheck Thin Lizzy, Rick Springfield, Shalamar and N-Trance which sounds like musical mayhem, but it really works, doesn't it?**
"I mean, I hope so. When I'm writing, I try to nail a certain feeling and any music that comes out of the moment gets sucked in. If I can listen to it and get that feeling from it, then to me, it works. It's like, if I believe in it, it'll work. Maybe that's delusional, ha!"

**You started out in hardcore punk bands and here you are paying homage to Whigfield on 'Saturday Night, Still Breathing'. Is there nothing that is out of bounds?**
"It's all the same to me. I'm not saying I love all music, but I tend to love it if it's from the heart. The best music finds an affinity with the listener and shares the moment with them. If I'm embracing and projecting music with love and respect then it's fair game."

**Are there any genres you couldn't make work on one of your albums?**
"I like a lot of minimal techno, but I don't think I could do it justice in that context. I love death metal, but probably wouldn't bring that into the fold. Besides, I've got a death metal band to do that [laughs]."

**Country and western perhaps?**
"I love country music, but I'm not going to start singing like I'm from Tennessee when I live in the south of Glasgow. Some people could pull that off and I'd be into it, but not me."

**Now you've said that, we fully expect you to figure out how to work that into your next album**
"I'm working on my concept country album about the horse-riding laws in Pollokshields right now, don't worry."

**Apostille's 'Prisoners Of Love And Hate' is released by Night School on 22 September**

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